

THE PHILOSOPHY  
OF RHETORIC



CAMPBELL

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GRENVILLE KLEISER

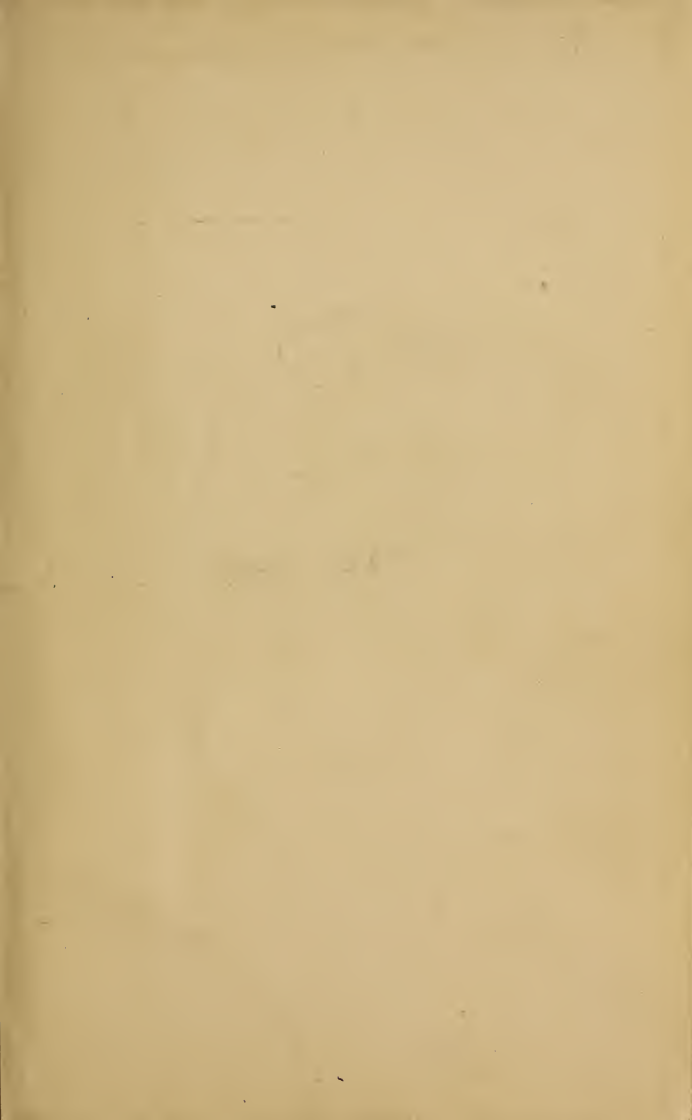


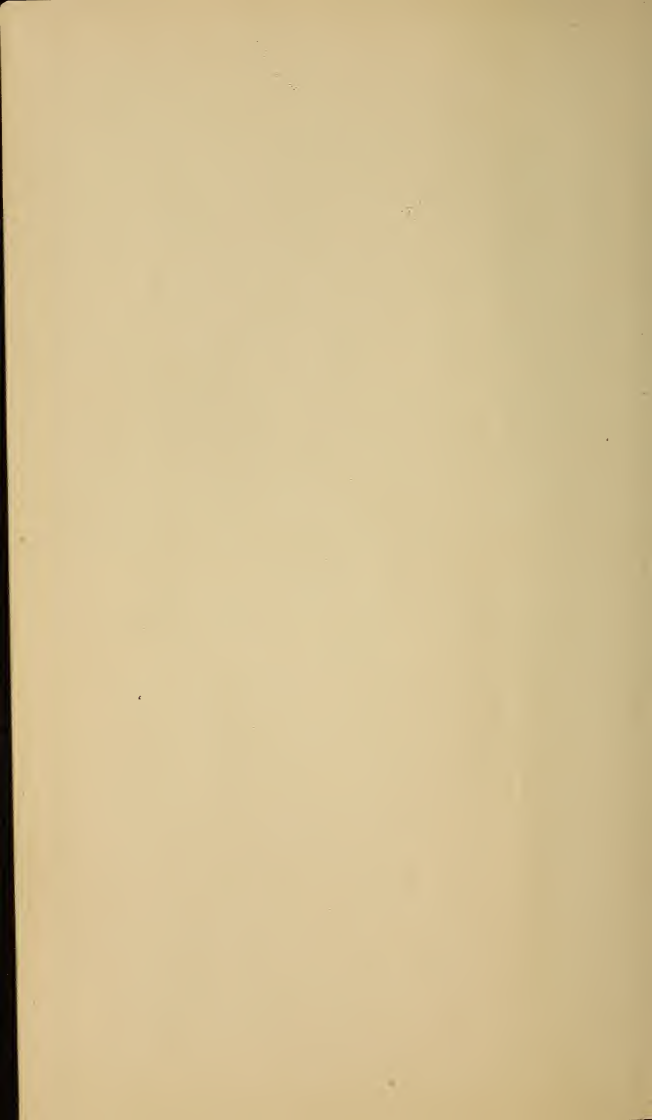
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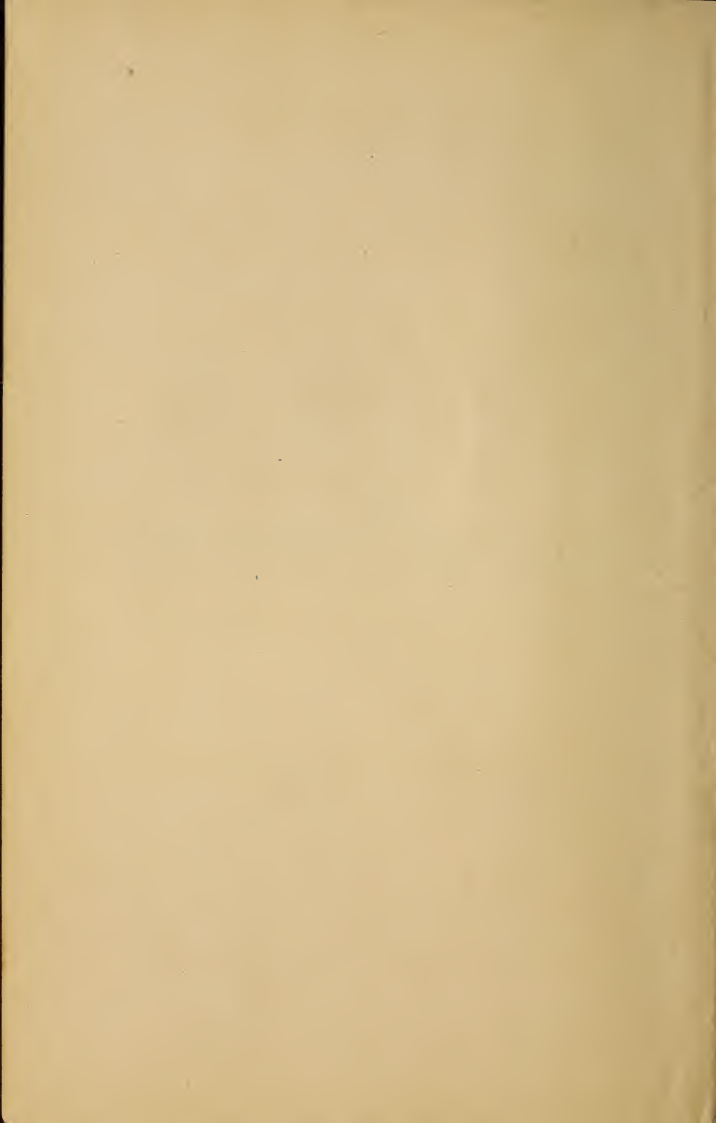
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THE  
PHILOSOPHY OF RHETORIC



PRACTICAL ENGLISH SERIES

# THE PHILOSOPHY OF RHETORIC

BY  
GEORGE CAMPBELL, D.D.

CONDENSED BY  
GRENVILLE KLEISER

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## TO THE STUDENT

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THE essays of George Campbell, published under the title of "The Philosophy of Rhetoric," have long been regarded as among the most valuable contributions to this subject. His dictum that "Whatever is faulty in any degree it were better to avoid," is quite as applicable now as it was in his own day. These essays, which I have condensed to meet the practical requirements of busy men interested in the study of correct English, are marked throughout by accuracy, modesty, and clearness. They will repay most careful perusal.

GRENVILLE KLEISER.



u. m. p. 1, Nov. 17, 1925.

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CHAPTER I  
THE LAW OF LANGUAGE



## CHAPTER I

### THE LAW OF LANGUAGE

**L**ANGUAGE is a species of fashion, established by consent of the people of a particular country. Grammar gives not law to language, but from speech derives its authority and value. The grammar of any language is no other than a collection of general observations methodically arranged, and comprizing all the modes previously and independently established, by which the significations, derivations, and combinations of words in that language are sustained. Every single anomaly stands on the same basis; custom has prescribed for it a particular rule. We, therefore, rest in these as fixt principles, that use, or the custom of speaking, is the sole original standard of conversation as far as regards the expression, and the custom of writing is the sole standard of style; that the latter comprehends the former, and something more; that to the tribunal of use, as to the supreme authority, and consequently, in every grammatical controversy, the last resort, we are entitled to appeal from the laws and the decisions of grammarians; and that this order of subordination ought never, on any account, to be reversed.

REPUTABLE USE

This is sometimes called general use, yet the generality of people speak and write very badly. The use here spoken of implies not only currency but vogue; it is properly reputable custom. Good use in language has the approbation of those who have not attained it. In the lower walks of life people hear words whose meaning they do not know; they pick them up, use, and misapply them. They are not themselves altogether unconscious of this defect. It often arises from an admiration of the manner of their superiors, and from an ill-judged imitation of their way of speaking, that the greatest errors of the illiterate, in respect of conversation, proceed. And were they sensible how widely different their use and application of such words is from that of those whom they affect to imitate, they would renounce their own immediately. In such as are within their reach they use such words and idioms which are denominated *vulgarisms*, whose use is not reputable. Many who have contracted a habit of employing such idioms do not approve them; and tho, through negligence, they frequently fall into them in conversation, they carefully avoid them in writing, or even in a solemn speech on any important occasion.

From the practise of those who are conversant in any art, elegant or mechanical, we take

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the sense of the terms and phrases belonging to that art; in like manner, from men of education we judge of the general use of the language. The conversation of men of rank and eminence regulates *pronunciation*; authors of reputation are our standard for all that concerns the construction and application of *words*.

I name them authors of reputation, rather than good authors, for two reasons: first, because it is more strictly conformable to the truth of the case. It is solely the esteem of the public, and not their intrinsic merit (tho these two go generally together) which raises them to this distinction, and stamps a value on their language. Secondly, this character is more definitive than the other, and therefore more extensively intelligible. Between two or more authors different readers will differ exceedingly as to the preference in point of merit, who agree perfectly as to the respective places they hold in the favor of the public. You may find persons of a taste so particular as to prefer some inferior writer to Milton, but you will hardly find a person that will dispute the superiority of the latter in the matter of fame. I need scarcely add, that when I speak of reputation, I mean not only in regard to knowledge, but in regard to the talent of communicating knowledge.

We have an abundance of writers in all the various kinds of composition to determine us

in those modes of speech which are authorized and reputable.

### NATIONAL USE

National use stands opposed to *provincial* and *foreign*. In every province peculiarities of dialect affect the pronunciation, accent, inflection, and combination of words, whereby their idiom is distinguished from that of the nation and all other provinces. These idioms are current among the middle and lower ranks. But still this use is bounded by the province, county, or district which gives name to the dialect, and beyond which its peculiarities are sometimes unintelligible, and always ridiculous.

For example, in some parts of Wales the common people say *goot* for good; in the south of Scotland they say *gude*, and in the north *gued*. Whenever one of these pronunciations prevails, you will never hear from a native either of the other two; but the word *good* is to be heard everywhere from natives as well as strangers. The provincials may not understand one another, but they all understand one who speaks properly.

What has been now said of provincial dialects may, with very little variation, be applied to professional dialects, or the cant which is sometimes observed to prevail among those of the same profession or way of life. The currency of the latter can not be so ex-

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actly circumscribed as that of the former, whose distinction is purely local; but their use is not on that account either more extensive or reputable. Let the following serve as instances of this kind. *Advice*, in the commercial idiom, means information or intelligence; *nervous*, in open defiance of analogy, does in the medical cant, as Johnson expresses it, denote having weak nerves; and the word *turtle*, tho' preoccupied time immemorial by a species of dove, is, as we learn from the same authority, employed by sailors and gluttons to signify a tortoise.

That national use might be opposed to foreign scarcely needs illustration, for the introduction of extraneous words and idioms from other languages and foreign nations is a greater transgression than the adoption into pure English of provincial terms and cant phrases. This is the error of the learned, that of the vulgar. As the introduction of foreign words and idioms is the result of learned affectation, they deserve less indulgence than native idioms of the vulgar, which have the merit of originality, and, for the most part, great pith of meaning.

### PRESENT USE

Good and national use being different in different periods in the same country, there are certain boundaries within which we must search for precedents for the use of our lan-

guage. The authority of Hooker and Raleigh will not now be admitted in support of a term not found in any good writer of a later date.

In truth, the boundary must not be fixt at the same distance in every subject. Poetry has ever been allowed a wider range than prose; and it is but just that, by an indulgence of this kind, some compensation should be made for the peculiar restraints it is laid under by the measure. Nor is this only a matter of convenience to the poet, it is also a matter of gratification to the reader. Diversity in the style relieves the ear, and prevents its being wearied by too frequent recurrence of the rimes, or sameness of the meter. But still there are limits to this diversity. The authority of Milton and of Waller on this subject remains as yet unquestioned. I should not think it prudent often to introduce words or phrases of which no example could be produced since the days of Spenser and of Shakespeare.

And even in prose, the bounds are not the same for every kind of composition. In matters of science the author is not confined within so narrow a circle. In composing history, romance, travels, moral essays, familiar essays, and the like, those words are to be considered obsolete which have been disused by good authors for a longer period than the age of man extends to, for our style must be regulated to present use.



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This remark affects also declensions, combination and construction of words. Either the present use is the standard of the language, or the language admits of no standard whatever. Critics are here not always judges. Their means produce sometimes a contrary effect. One critic may place you in the age of Elizabeth, another in the present; a third in the time of Chaucer. And with regard to etymology, about which grammarians make so much useless bustle, if every one has a privilege of altering words, according to his own opinion of their origin, the opinions of the learned being on this subject so various, nothing but a general chaos can ensue.

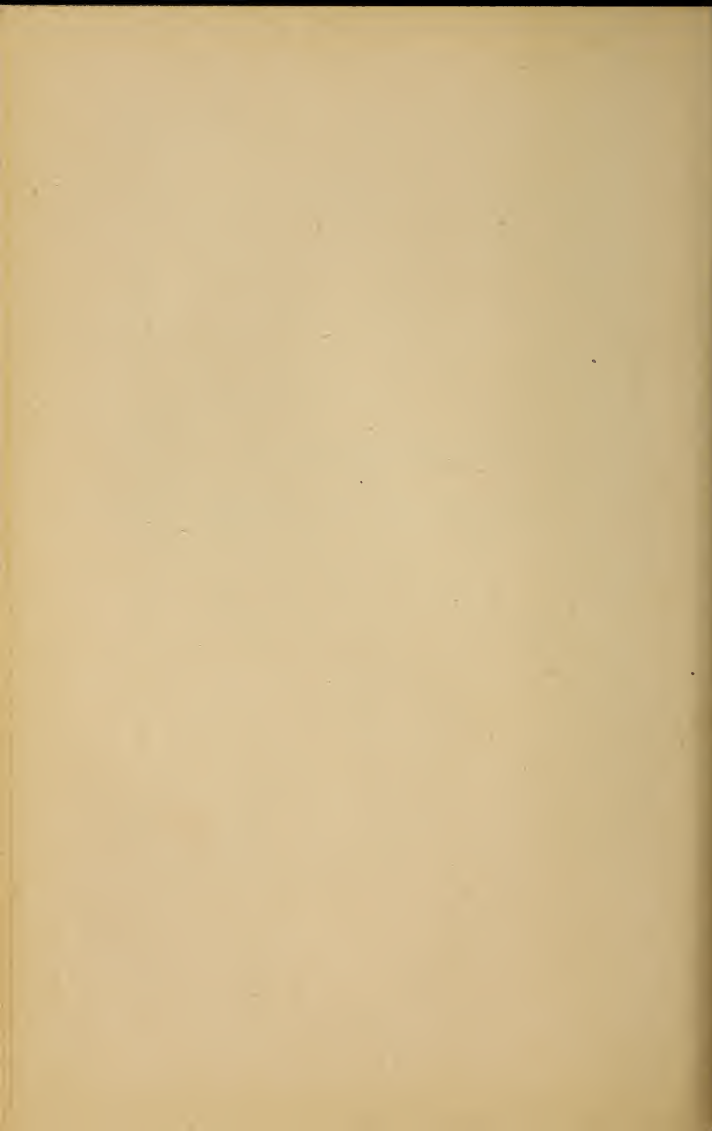
Present use is here mentioned in respect of place as opposed to *absent*, and in respect of time to *past* or *future*, that now have no existence. If we recur to the standard already assigned, namely, the writings of a plurality of celebrated authors, there will be no scope for the comprehension of words and idioms which can be denominated novel. It must be owned that we often meet with such terms and phrases in newspapers, periodicals and political pamphlets.

A popular orator in the House of Commons has a sort of patent from the public, during the continuance of his popularity, for coining as many as he pleases; and they are no sooner issued than they obtrude themselves upon us from every quarter, in all the daily papers,

letters, essays and addresses. But this is of no significance. Such words and phrases are but the fashion of a season at the most. The people, always fickle, are just as prompt to drop them as they were to take them up. And not one of a hundred survives the particular occasion or party-struggle which gave it birth. We may justly apply to them what Johnson says of a great number of the terms of the laborious and mercantile part of the people, "This fugitive cant can not be regarded as any part of the durable materials of a language, and therefore must be suffered to perish, with other things unworthy of preservation."

As use, therefore, implies duration, and as even a few years are not sufficient for ascertaining the characters of authors, the examples, for the most part, to be found in this work are neither from living authors, nor from those who wrote before the revolution. The Bible is excepted from this restriction. And thus I have explained what use is, which is the sole mistress of the language. Grammar and criticism are but her ministers; but tho servants, they sometimes, like other ministers, impose the dictates of their own humor upon the people as the commands of their sovereign.

CHAPTER II  
CANONS OF CRITICISM



## CHAPTER II

### CANONS OF CRITICISM

PURITY is the first thing that claims our attention in elocution. All other qualities have their foundation in this. The great standard of purity is *use*. The grammarian compiles rules for the use of words; the verbal critic calls attention to the abuses that have crept into the language. Both facilitate the knowledge of the language to natives and foreigners. Canons of criticism condemn as transgressions of the radical laws of the language whatever is repugnant to reputable, national and present use, in the sense wherein these epithets have been explained. But on this subject of use there arises two eminent questions, the determination of which may lead to the establishment of other canons not less important. The first question is this: "Is reputable, national, and present use, which, for brevity's sake, I shall hereafter simply denominate good use, always uniform in her decisions?" The second is: "As no term, idiom, or application that is totally unsupported by her can be admitted to be good, is every term, idiom, and application that is countenanced by her to be esteemed good, and therefore worthy to be retained?"

GOOD USE NOT ALWAYS UNIFORM  
IN HER DECISIONS

In answer to the former of these questions, there is not, in every case, a perfect uniformity in the determinations even of such use as may justly be denominated good. Wherever a number of authorities can be produced in support of two different tho resembling modes of expression for the same thing, there is always a divided use, and one can not be said to speak barbarously, or to oppose the usage of the language, who conforms to either side. This divided use has place sometimes in single words, sometimes in construction, and sometimes in arrangement. In all such cases there is scope for choice; and it belongs, without question, to the critical art to lay down the principles, by which, in doubtful cases, our choice should be directed.

There are, indeed, some differences in single words, which ought still to be retained. They are a kind of synonym, and afford a little variety, without occasioning any inconvenience whatever. In arrangement, too, it certainly holds that various manners suit various styles, as various styles suit various subjects and various sorts of composition. For this reason, unless when some obscurity, ambiguity, or inelegance is created, no disposition of words which has obtained the public approbation ought to be altogether rejected. In con-

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struction the case is somewhat different. Purity, perspicuity and elegance generally require that in this there be the strictest uniformity. Yet differences here are not only allowable, but even convenient, when attended with corresponding differences in the application. Thus the verb *to found*, when used literally, is more properly followed by the preposition *on*, as "The house was *founded on* a rock." In the metaphorical application, it is often better with *in*, as in this sentence, "They maintained that dominion is *founded in* grace." Both sentences would be badly expressed were the prepositions transposed. There are cases in which either is good. In those instances of divided use which give scope for choice, the following canons are proposed to assist us in assigning the preference. The authorities on both sides are supposed equal, or nearly so. When those on one side preponderate it is vain to oppose them. Custom when wavering may be swayed, but when reluctant she can not be forced.

### Canon the First

The first canon, then, shall be: When use is divided as to any particular word or phrase, and the expression used by one part has been preoccupied, or is in any instance susceptible of a different signification, and the expression employed by the other part never admits a different sense, both perspicuity and variety



require that the form of expression which is in every instance strictly univocal, be preferred.

For this reason *ought*, signifying any thing, is preferable to *ought*, which is one of our defective verbs; *by consequence*, meaning consequently, is preferable to *of consequence*, as this expression is often employed to denote momentous or important. In the prepositions *toward* and *towards*, and the adverbs *forward* and *forwards*, *backward* and *backwards*, the two forms are used indiscriminately. But as the first form in all these is also an adjective, it is better to confine the particles to the second. Custom, too, seems at present to lean this way. *Besides* and *beside* serve both as conjunctions and as prepositions. There appears some tendency to assign to each a separate province. To humor this tendency employ the former as a conjunction, the latter as a preposition.

This principle gives a preference to *extemporary*, as an adjective for *extempore*. We say with equal propriety, an *extemporary* prayer, an *extemporary* sermon, and he *prays extempore*, he *preaches extempore*. By the same rule we prefer *scarcely* as an adverb to *scarce*, which is an adjective; and *exceedingly* as an adverb, to *exceeding*, which is a participle. For the same reason I prefer that use which makes *ye* the nominative plural of the personal pronoun *thou*, and *you* the accusa-



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tive, when applied to an actual plurality. When used for the singular, custom has determined it shall be *you* in both cases.

From the like principle, in those verbs which have for the participle passive both the preterit form and one peculiar, the peculiar form ought to have the preference. Thus, I have *gotten*, I have *hidden*, I have *spoken*, are better than I have *got*, I have *hid*, I have *spoke*.

From the same principle I think *ate* is preferable in the preterit tense, and *eaten* in the participle, to *eat*, which is the constant form of the present, tho sometimes also used for both the others.

### Canon the Second

The second canon is: In doubtful cases regard ought to be had in our decisions to the analogies of the language.

For this reason I prefer *contemporary* to *cotemporary*. The general use in words compounded with the preposition *con* is to retain the *n* before a consonant and to expunge it before a vowel or an *h* mute. Thus, we say *conjuncture*, *concomitant*; but *coequal*, *coeternal*, *coinclude*. I know but one exception, which is *copartner*. But in dubious cases we ought to follow the rule, and not the exception. If by the former canon the adverbs *backwards* and *forwards* are preferable to *backward* and *forward*, by this canon, from the principle of

analogy, *afterwards* and *homewards* should be preferred to *afterward* and *homeward*. Of the two adverbs *therabout* and *thereabouts*, compounded of the particle *there* and the preposition, the former alone is analogical, there being no such word in the language as *abouts*. The same holds of *hereabout* and *whereabout*. In the verbs *to dare* and *to need*, many say, in the third person present singular, *dare* and *need*, as "he *need* not go; he *dare* not do it." Others say *dares* and *needs*. As the first usage is exceedingly irregular, hardly anything less than uniform practise could authorize it. This rule supplies us with another reason for preferring *scarcely* and *exceedingly* as adverbs to *scarce* and *exceeding*. The phrases "*Would to God*" and "*Would God*" both can plead the authority of custom; but the latter is strictly analogical, the former is not. It is an established idiom in the English tongue that any of the auxiliaries *might*, *could*, *would*, *should*, *did* and *had*, with the nominative subjoined, should express sometimes a supposition, sometimes a wish: and either is discovered from the context. The phrase *ever so*, as when we say, "tho he were *ever so* good" is preferable to *never so*. Of the two phrases, *in no wise* in three words, and *nowise* in one, the last only is conformable to the present genius of the tongue. Sometimes *whether* is followed by *no*, sometimes by *not*. For instance, some

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would say, "*Whether he will or no*"; others, "*Whether he will or not.*" Of these it is the latter only that is analogical. There is an ellipsis of the verb in the last clause, which when you supply, you find it necessary to use the adverb not, "*Whether he will or will not.*" By both the preceding canons we ought always to say *rend* in the present of the indicative and of the infinitive, and never *rent*, as is sometimes done. The preterit and participle passive are *rent*; the active participle is *rending* and not *renting*.

### Canon the Third

When terms or expressions are, in other respects, equal, that ought to be preferred which is most agreeable to the ear.

Hence *delicateness* has given way to *delicacy*, *authenticallness* to *authenticity*, and *vindicative* to *vindictive*. Harsh sounds and unmusical periods must be avoided; yet the influence of this rule prejudices both the former canons in some instances. Thus we say *ingenuity* in preference to *ingeniousness*, tho the former can not be deduced analogically from *ingenious*.

### Canon the Fourth

In cases wherein none of the foregoing rules give either side a ground of preference, simplicity ought to determine our choice.

Under the name of simplicity I must be understood to comprehend also brevity, for

that expression is always the simplest which, with equal purity and perspicuity, is the briefest. We have, for instance, several active verbs which are used either with or without a preposition indiscriminately. Thus we say either *accept*, or *accept of*, *admit* or *admit of*, *approve* or *approve of*; in like manner *address* or *address to*, *attain* or *attain to*. In such instances it will hold, I suppose, pretty generally that the simple form is preferable. This appears particularly in the passive voice, in which every one must see the difference. "His present was *accepted of* by his friend," "his excuse was *admitted of* by his master," "the magistrates were *addrest to* by the townsmen," are evidently much worse than "His present was *accepted* by his friend," "his excuse was *admitted* by his master," "the magistrates were *addrest* by the townsmen." Whenever the preposition obtains in the active voice, the rules of syntax will require it in the passive. Sometimes the verb has two regimens, and then the preposition is necessary to one of them; as, "I address myself to my judges," "They address their vows to Apollo." We say *subtract*, not *substract*; *subtraction*, not *substraction*.

#### Canon the Fifth

The fifth and only other canon that occurs to me on the subject of divided use, is in the few cases wherein neither perspicuity nor

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analogy, neither sound nor simplicity, assists us in fixing our choice, when it is safest to prefer that manner which is most conformable to ancient usage.

This is founded on a very plain maxim, that in languages, as in several other things, any change, except when it is clearly advantageous, is ineligible. This affords another reason for preferring that usage which distinguishes *ye* as the nominative plural of *thou*, when more than one are addrest, from *you* the accusative. For it may be remarked, that this distinction is very regularly observed in our translation of the Bible, as well as in all our best ancient authors. Milton, too, is particularly attentive to it. *Jail, jailer*, were used before *gaol, gaoler*, from the French *geole*. We write *garter* and not *jarter*, tho the primitive be *jartiere*. Now would it violate the laws of pronounciation in English more to sound the *ja* as tho it were written *ga*, than to sound the *ga* as tho it were written *ja*?

### EVERYTHING FAVORED BY GOOD USE IS NOT ON THAT ACCOUNT WORTHY TO BE RETAINED

This is the second question for ascertaining both the extent of the authority claimed by custom and the rightful prerogatives of criticism, as no term, idiom, or application that is totally unsupported by use can be admitted

to be good. Is every term, idiom, and application that is countenanced by use, to be esteemed good, and therefore worthy to be retained? Tho nothing in language can be good from which use withholds her approbation, there may be many things to which she gives it that are not in all respects good or such as are worthy to be retained and imitated. In some instances *custom* may very properly be checked by *criticism*, which has a sort of negative, and tho not the censorian power of instant degradation, the privilege of remonstrating, and by means of this, when used discreetly, of bringing what is bad into disrepute, and so canceling it gradually, but which has no positive right to establish anything. Its power, too, is like that of eloquence; it operates on us purely by persuasion, depending for success on the solidity, or at least the speciousness of the arguments; whereas custom has an unaccountable and irresistible influence over us, an influence which is prior to persuasion, and independent of it—nay, sometimes even in contradiction to it. Of different modes of expression, that which comes to be favored by general practise may be denominated best, because established; but it can not always be said with truth that it is established because best. The best forms of speech do not always establish themselves by their own superior excellence. Time and chance have an effect on language as on all



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things human. Hence the approbation of forms of speech in some respects faulty.

In order to discard gross improprieties, do not use them. The difference between the bare omission of a word and the introduction of what is unusual is this: The former, provided what you substitute in its stead be proper and have the authority of custom, can never come under the observation, or at least the reprehension, of a reader; whereas the latter shocks our ears immediately. Here, therefore, lies one principal province of criticism, to point out the characters of those words and idioms which deserve to be disfranchised and consigned to perpetual oblivion. It is by carefully filing off all roughness and inequalities that languages, like metals, must be polished. This, indeed, is an effect of taste. Thence it happens that the first rudiments of taste no sooner appear in any people than the language begins, as it were, of itself, to emerge out of that state of rudeness in which it will ever be found in uncivilized nations. As they improve in arts and sciences their speech refines; it not only becomes richer and more comprehensive, but acquires greater precision, perspicuity and harmony. This effect taste insensibly produces among the people long before the language becomes the object of their attention. But when criticism has called their attention to this object, there is a probability that the effect will be accelerated.

It is no less certain, on the other hand, that in the declension of taste and science language will unavoidably degenerate, and tho the critical art may retard a little, it will never be able to prevent this degeneracy. I shall therefore subjoin a few remarks under the form of canons, in relation to those words that merit degradation.

#### Canon the Sixth

All words and phrases remarkably harsh and unharmonious, and not absolutely necessary, may be judged worthy of this fate.

A word is absolutely necessary when we have no synonymous words to supply its place if dismiss, or no way of conveying the same idea without a circumlocution. The only difficulty is to fix the criteria by which we may discriminate the obnoxious words from all others. The words *bare-faced-ness*, *shame-faced-ness*, *un-success-ful-ness*, *dis-interest-ed-ness*, *wrong-headed-ness*, *tender-heart-ed-ness*, are compound words whose parts are not easily united; they are so heavy and drawling that they have not more vivacity than a periphrasis to compensate for the defect of harmony.

Another criterion is, when a word is so formed and accented as to render it of difficult utterance to the speaker, and consequently disagreeable in sound to the hearer. This happens in two cases: First, when the



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syllables which immediately follow the accented syllable are so crowded with consonants as of necessity to retard the pronunciation. The words *questionless*, *chronicles*, *conventiclers*, *concupiscence*, are examples of this. The accent in all these is on the antepenultimate, for which reason the last two syllables ought to be pronounced quickly, a thing scarcely practicable on account of the number of consonants which occur in these syllables. The attempt to quicken the pronunciation, tho familiar to Englishmen, exhibits to strangers the appearance of awkward hurry, instead of that easy fluency to be found in those words wherein the unaccented syllables are naturally short. Such are *levity*, *vanity*, *avidity*, all accented in like manner on the antepenultimate. The second case in which a similar dissonance is found is when too many syllables follow the accented syllable, for tho these be naturally short, their number, if they exceed two, makes a disagreeable pronunciation. Examples of this are the words *primarily*, *cursorily*, *summarily*, *peremptorily*, all of which are accented on the first syllable.

A third criterion is, when a short or unaccented syllable is repeated, or followed by another short unaccented syllable. This always gives the appearance of stammering to the pronunciation. Such are the words *holily*, *sillily*. The adverbial termination is added to few words ending in *ly*, as *lowlily*. The simple

forms, *heavenly, godly, timely, daily, homely, courtly, comely*, serve both for adjective and adverb.

It deserves our notice that the repetition of a syllable is never offensive when either one or both are long as in *papa, mama, murmur, tartar, barbarous, lily*.

Beside the cases aforesaid, I know of none that ought to dispose us to the total disuse of words really significant. A little harshness by the collision of consonants, which, nevertheless, our organs find no difficulty in articulating, and which do not suggest to the hearer the disagreeable idea either of precipitation or of stammering, are by no means a sufficient reason for the suppression of a useful term. The monosyllables, *judg'd, drudg'd, grudg'd*, which some have thought very offensive, appear not in the least exceptionable, compared with the words above mentioned. It would not do well to introduce such hard and strong sounds too frequently; but when they are used sparingly and properly they have even a good effect. Variety in sound is advantageous to a language, and it is convenient that we should have some sounds that are rough and masculine, as well as some that are liquid and feminine.

I observe this the rather, because I think there is at present a greater risk of going too far in refining than of not going far enough. The ears of some critics are immoderately

delicate, and they would extirpate *encroach*, *encroachment*, *inculcate*, *purport*, *methinks*. This humor, were it prevalent, would injure our language.

### Canon the Seventh

When etymology plainly points to a signification different from that which the word commonly bears, propriety and simplicity both require its dismissal.

I use the word *plainly*, because, when the etymology is from an ancient or foreign language, or from obsolete roots in our own language, or when it is obscure or doubtful, no regard should be had to it. The case is different when the roots are English, and, being in present use, clearly suggest another meaning. Of this kind is the word *beholden*, for obliged or indebted. As the passive participle of the verb to *behold*, it conveys a different sense. The word *beholding* to express the same thing is more exceptionable. To *vouchsafe*, as denoting to *condescend*, is liable to a similar exception, and may be dispensed with. The verb to unloose should analogically signify *to tie*, in like manner as *to untie* signifies *to loose*. To what purpose is it, then, to retain a term without any necessity in a signification the reverse of that which its etymology manifestly suggests? In the same way, *to annul* and *to disannul* ought, by analogy, to be contraries, tho irregularly used as synonymous.

The verb *to unravel*, commonly, indeed, as well as analogically, signifies to disentangle, to extricate; sometimes, however, it is absurdly employed to denote the contrary, to disorder, to entangle, as in these lines, in the address to the Goddess of Dulness:

Or quite unravel all the reasoning thread,  
And hand some curious cobweb in its stead.

All considerations of analogy, propriety, and perspicuity unite in persuading us to repudiate this preposterous application altogether.

#### Canon the Eighth

The eighth canon is, when any words become obsolete, or at least are never used, except as constituting part of particular phrases, it is better to dispense with their service entirely and give up the phrases.

The reasons are: First, because the disuse in ordinary cases renders the term somewhat indefinite, and occasions a degree of obscurity; second, because the introduction of words which never appear but with the same attendants gives the style an air of vulgarity and cant. Examples of this we have in the words *lief*, *dint*, *whit*, *moot*, *pro* and *con*; as "*I had as lief go myself*," for, "*I should like as well to go myself*." He convinced his antagonist "*by dint of argument*," that is, "*by strength of argument*." "*By dint of arms*," for "*by*

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force of arms." "He is not a *whit better*," for "he is no better." "The case you mention is a *moot point*," for "a disputable point." "Debated *pro and con*," for "on both sides."

### Canon the Ninth

All those phrases which, when analyzed grammatically, include a solecism, and all those to which use has affixt a particular sense, but which, when explained by the general and established rules of the language, are susceptible either of a different sense or of no sense, ought to be discarded altogether.

It is this kind of phraseology which is distinguished by the epithet *idiomatic*, and has been originally the spawn, partly of ignorance and partly of affectation. Of the first sort, which includes a solecism, is the phrase, "I *had* rather *do* such a thing," for "I would rather do it." The auxiliary *had*, joined to the infinitive active *do*, is a gross violation of the rules of conjugation in our language, and tho good use may be considered as protecting this expression from being branded with the name of a blunder, yet as it is both irregular and unnecessary, I can foresee no inconvenience that will arise from dropping it. The phrase "I had" has sprung from the contraction *I'd*, and that from *I would*. Of the second sort, which when explained grammatically, leads to a different sense from its original import, is the phrase, "He sings a good song,"

for "He sings well." "He plays a good fiddle," for "He plays well on the fiddle." We speak of *playing a tune*; but we play *on the instrument*.

We say a "river empties itself." *To empty* is to evacuate. A river falls into the sea, a ship falls down the river. The following phrases are vile: "*Currying favor*," "*Having a month's mind for a thing*," "*Dancing attendance*," and many others. Of the same kind also, tho not reprehensible in the same degree, is the idiomatic use that is sometimes made of certain verbs, as *stand*, for insist: "He *stands* upon security"; *take*, for understand, in such phrases as these, "You *take* me," and "as I *take* it"; *hold*, for continue, as "He does not *hold* long in one mind." But of all kinds, the worst is that wherein the words, when construed, are susceptible of no meaning at all. Such an expression is the following: "There were seven ladies in the company, every one prettier than another," by which it is intended, I suppose, to denote that they were all very pretty. One prettier implies that there is another less pretty; but where every one is prettier, there can be none less, and consequently none more pretty. Such trash is the disgrace of any tongue. Ambitiously to display nonsensical phrases of this sort, as some writers have affected to do, under the ridiculous notion of a familiar and easy manner, is not to set off the riches of a



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language, but to expose its rags. As such idioms, therefore, err alike against purity, simplicity, perspicuity and elegance, they are entitled to no quarter from the critic. A few of these in the writings of good authors I shall have occasion to point out when I come to speak of solecism and impropriety.

The five first of these canons suggest the principles by which our choice ought to be directed in cases wherein use is wavering, the four last point out improvements in the critical art. There ought to be in support of every sentence of proscription from our mother tongue, an evident plea for the principles of perspicuity, elegance and harmony.

The want of etymology is not a sufficient ground for the expression of words significant and useful; as well might we reject the services of a man who could give no history of his pedigree. Tho' what is called *cant* is generally, not necessarily, nor always, without etymology, it is not this defect, but the baseness of the use, which fixes on it that disgraceful appellation. No absolute monarch has it more in his power to ennoble a person of obscure birth than it is in the power of good use to ennoble words of low or dubious extraction; such, for instance, as have either arisen, nobody knows how, like *fib*, *banter*, *bigot*, *fop*, *flippant*, among the rabble; or like *flimsy*, sprung from the cant of manufacturers. It is never from an attention to etymology, which

would frequently mislead us, but from custom, the only infallible guide in this matter, that the meanings of words in present use must be learned. And, indeed, if the want in question were material, it would equally effect all those words, no inconsiderable part of our language, whose descent is doubtful or unknown. Besides, in no case can the line of derivation be traced backward to infinity. We must always terminate in some words of whose genealogy no account can be given.

These words are base in the birth: *Transmogrify, bamboozle, topsy-turvy, pell-mell, helter-skelter, hurly-burly*. A person of low birth may be raised to the rank of nobility, and may become it; but nothing can add dignity to that man, or fit him for the company of gentlemen, who bears indelible marks of the clown in his look, gait and whole behavior.



CHAPTER III  
OF GRAMMATICAL PURITY



### CHAPTER III

## OF GRAMMATICAL PURITY

**I**T WAS remarked in Chapter II, that tho the grammatical art bears much the same relation to the rhetorical which the art of the mason bears to that of the architect, there is one very important difference between the two cases. In architecture it is not necessary that he who designs should execute his own plans. He may therefore be an excellent artist in his way who has neither skill nor practise in masonry. On the contrary, it is equally incumbent on the orator to design and to execute. He ought, therefore, to be master of the language which he speaks or writes, and to be capable of adding to grammatical purity those higher qualities of elocution which will give grace and energy to his discourse. I propose, then, in the first place, by way of laying the foundation, to consider that purity which he has in common with the grammarian, and then proceed to consider those qualities of speech which are peculiarly oratorical.

It was also observed before, that the art of the logician is universal, the art of the grammarian particular. Our subject being language, it is necessary to make choice of a particular tongue. Let the English be that

tongue. Pure English implies three things: First, that the words *BE* English; second, that their construction be in the English idiom; third, that the words and phrases be employed to express the precise meaning which custom has affixt to them.

As purity implies three things, there are three different ways in which it may be injured. First, the words used may not be English. This fault has received from grammarians the denomination of *barbarism*. Secondly, the construction of the sentence may not be in the English idiom. This has the name *solecism*. Thirdly, the words and phrases may not be employed to express the precise meaning which custom has affixt to them. This is termed *impropriety*.

### THE BARBARISM

The reproach of barbarism may be incurred in three different ways: By the use of words entirely obsolete, by the use of words entirely new, or by new formations and compositions from simple and primitive words in present use.

#### By the Use of Obsolete Words

Obsolete words, proper in the days of our forefathers, have no more title to be introduced now than foreign words; besides, they suggest an idea of stiffness and affectation.

We ought, therefore, to avoid these words which are no longer used in discourse or modern composition.

This rule does not apply to poets, who take what license they please—so the laws of versification allow them. Besides, in treating some topics—passages of ancient story, for example.—there may be found sometimes a suitability in the introduction of old words. In certain kinds of style, when used sparingly and with judgment, they serve to add the venerable air of antiquity to the narrative. In burlesque also they often produce a good effect. But it is admitted on all sides that this species of writing is not strictly subjected to the laws of purity.

### By the Use of New Words

Another tribe of barbarisms much more numerous is constituted by new words. Here, indeed, the hazard is more imminent, as the tendency to this extreme is more prevalent. Nay, our language is in greater danger of being overwhelmed by an inundation of foreign words than of any other species of destruction. There is, doubtless, some excuse for borrowing the assistance of neighbors, when their assistance is really wanted—that is, when we can not do our business without it; but there is certainly a meanness in choosing to be indebted to others for what we can easily be supplied with out of our own stock.

When words are introduced by any writer from a sort of necessity in order to avoid tedious and languid circumlocutions, there is reason to believe they will soon be adopted by others convinced of the necessity, and will at length be naturalized by the public. The public should, however, reject those intruders brought in through a licentious affectation of novelty.

The rules of pronunciation in French and English are different, and the introduction of foreign words load our grammatical rules with exceptions which corrupt the simplicity and regularity of our tongue.

Nor is this the only way in which they corrupt its simplicity. Let it be observed further that one of the principal beauties of any language, and the most essential to simplicity, results from this: That a few plain and primitive words called roots have, by an analogy, which has insensibly established itself, given rise to an infinite number of derivative and compound words, between which and the primitive, and between the former and their conjugates, there is a resemblance in sense corresponding to that which there is in sound. Hence it will happen that a word may be very emphatic in the language to which it owes its birth, arising from the light that is reflected on it by the other words of the same etymology; but when transplanted into another language loses its emphasis entirely.

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The Latin language was corrupted by the introduction of foreign words; the Greek was preserved pure by the rejection of all foreign idioms. The Greeks called every foreign term in their writers a *barbarism*. If the introduction of exotic words were never admitted except in such cases, or in order to supply an evident want among ourselves, we should not at present have one such term where we have fifty. The advice of the poet with regard to both the before-mentioned sorts of barbarism is extremely good.

In words, as fashions, the same rule will hold;  
Alike fantastic, if too new or old:  
Be not the first by whom the new are try'd,  
Nor yet the last to lay the old aside.

### By the Use of Words New-modeled

The third species of barbarism is that produced by new formations and compositions from primitives in present use. I acknowledge that when the English analogy is observed in the derivation or composition, and when the new-coined word is wanted in the language, greater liberty ought to be given on this matter than on the former. The reason of the difference will appear from what has been said already. But still this is a liberty which needs an excuse from necessity, and is in no case pardonable, unless the words be at least not disagreeable to the ear, and be so analogically formed that a reader, without

the help of the context, may easily discover the meaning.

If the word be a substantive, the preposition is commonly *of*; if the passive participle, *by*; and if the active participle, no preposition is requisite. Thus *self-love* is the *love of one's self*. In the same way are resolved *self-hate*, *self-murder*, *self-preservation*. When we say of a man that he is *self-condemned*, we mean that he is *condemned by himself*. A *self-consuming fire* is a fire *consuming itself*. Proper names when introduced into the English tongue should be made easy of pronunciation by such slight alteration as analogy dictates. But it is carrying the refinement too far to write *Zerdusht* for *Zoroaster*, *Confutee* for *Confucius*, *Moslem* for *Mussulman*, *Pasha* for *Bashaw*.

I shall just mention another set of barbarisms, which also comes under this class, and arises from the abbreviation of polysyllables by lopping off all the syllables except the first, or the first and second. Instances of this are: *Hyp* for *hypochondriac*, *rep* for *reputation*, *ult* for *ultimate*, *penult* for *penultimate*, *incog* for *incognito*, *hyper* for *hypercritical*, *extra* for *extraordinary*. Happily all these affected terms have been denied the public suffrage. The humor of abbreviating now hardly subsists among us, and requires no particular notice.

The two classes of barbarisms last men-



tioned, comprehending new words and new formations from words still current, offend against use, considered both as reputable and as national. There are many other sorts of transgressions which might be enumerated here, such as vulgarisms, provincial idioms, and the cant of particular professions. But these are more commonly ranked among the offenses against elegance than among the violations of grammatical purity, and will, therefore, be considered afterward.

### THE SOLECISM

I now enter on the consideration of the second way by which the purity of style is injured—the *solecism*. This is accounted by grammarians a more serious fault than the former, as it displays a greater ignorance of the fundamental rules of the language. The sole aim of grammar is to convey the knowledge of the language; consequently the degree of grammatical demerit in every blunder can only be ascertained by the degree of deficiency in this knowledge which it betrays. But the aim of eloquence is quite another thing. The speaker or the writer does not purpose to display his knowledge in the language, but only to employ the language which he speaks or writes in order to attain some further end. He uses this knowledge solely as the instrument to please, to move, or to per-

suade. When solecisms are not glaring, when they do not darken the sense, or suggest some ridiculous idea, the rhetorician regards them as much more excusable than barbarisms. The former are the effects of negligence, the latter of affectation.

Grammatical inaccuracies ought to be avoided by a writer, for two reasons. One is that a reader will much sooner discover them than a hearer however attentive he be. The other is, as writing implies more leisure and greater coolness than is implied in speaking, defects of this kind, when discovered in the former, will be less excused than they would be in the latter.

To enumerate all the kinds of solecism into which it is possible to fall would be both a useless and an endless task. The transgression of any of the syntactic rules is a solecism; and almost every rule may be transgressed in various ways. But as only novices are capable of falling into the most flagrant solecisms—such, I mean, as betray ignorance in the rudiments of the tongue, I shall leave it to grammarians to exemplify, and class the various blunders of this sort which may be committed by the learner.

*Cherubim* for *cherub*, and *seraphim* for *seraph* are an inaccuracy of the plural for the singular. *Cherubims* and *seraphims* are quite improper for the plural.

Inaccuracies are often found in the way

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wherein the degrees of comparison are applied and construed. Some of these, I suspect, have, as yet, escaped the animadversion of all our critics. Before I produce examples, it will be proper to observe that the comparative degree implies commonly a comparison of one thing with one other thing; the superlative, on the contrary, always implies a comparison of one thing with many others. The former consequently requires to be followed by the singular number; the latter by the plural. In our language the conjunction *than* must be interposed between the things compared in the former case; the preposition *of* is always used in the latter.

“This noble nation has of *all others* admitted fewer corruptions,” should read, “This noble nation has admitted fewer corruptions than any other.”

Sometimes, indeed, the comparative is rightly followed by a plural, as “He is wiser than we”; but it can not be construed with the preposition *of* before that to which it is compared. We rightly say, “He is the taller of the two,” because the words following the preposition comprehend both sides of the comparison. We also say, “This is the weaker of the two.”

I shall subjoin to this an inaccuracy in a comparison of equality, where, tho the positive degree only is used, the construction must be similar to that of the comparative, both being

followed by conjunctions which govern no case. "Such notions would be avowed at this time by none but rosicrucians, and fanatics as mad as *them*." Grammatically *they*, the verb *are* being understood. *Than* and *as* are used as conjunctions in the comparison of equality.

It is wrong to say, "There's the books you wanted" for "there are the books"; and "you was present" for "you *were* present," when address to a single person, is reckoned a solecism.

Incorrectness in using the superlative degree appears in the subsequent quotations: "The vice of covetousness is what enters deepest into the soul of *any other*." An instance of the same fault I shall give from a writer of no small merit for harmony and elegance: "We have a profession set apart for the purpose of persuasion, wherewith a talent of this kind would prove *the likeliest* perhaps of *any other*." I do not here criticize the word *other* in those examples, which, in my opinion, is likewise faulty, after the superlative; but this fault comes under another category. The error I mean, at present, to point out is the superlative followed by the singular number, "the deepest of any other," "the likeliest of any other." We should not say, "the best of any man," or "the best of any other man," for "the best of men." We may indeed say, "He is the oldest of the family." But the word family is a collective noun, and equivalent to *all in*

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*the house*. In like manner, it may be said, "The eyes are the worst of his face." But this expression is evidently deficient. The face is not the thing with which the eyes are compared, but contains the things with which they are compared. The sentence, when the ellipsis is supplied, stands thus: "Of all the features of his face, the eyes are the worst."

Both the expressions above censured may be corrected by substituting the comparative in place of the superlative. "The vice of covetousness is what enters *deeper* into the soul *than any other*." And we have a profession, etc., wherein a talent of this kind would prove *likelier* perhaps *than any other*. It is also possible to retain the superlative and render the expression grammatical: "Covetousness is what *of all vices* enters the deepest into the soul," and "wherein a talent of this kind would perhaps *of all talents* prove the *likeliest*."

The numeral adjective in the following sentence belongs to no entire word in the sentence as its substantive. "The first project was to shorten discourse by cutting polysyllables into one." The term *one* relates to *syllable*, a part of the word polysyllable. This is ungrammatical. The expression is likewise exceptionable on the score of impropriety. "My Christian and surname begin and end with the same letters." The word Christian is here an adjective, having for its substantive the last

syllable of the word *surname*. The expression is also exceptionable on the score of perspicuity, of which afterward.

Sometimes the pronoun does not suit the antecedent. "Each of the sexes," says Addison, "should keep within its particular bounds, and content themselves to exult within *their* respective districts." *Themselves* and *their* can not grammatically refer to *each* as singular. Besides the trespass here is the more glaring that these pronouns are coupled with *its*, referring to the same noun.

In no part of speech do good writers more frequently fall into mistakes than in the verbs. Of these I shall give some specimens out of a much greater number which might be collected. The first shall be of a wrong tense, "Ye *will* not come unto me that ye might have life." In two clauses thus connected, when the first verb is in the present or the future, the second, which is dependent on it, can not be in the past. The words, therefore, ought to have been translated, "that ye *may* have life." On the contrary, had the first verb been in the preterit, the second ought to have been so, too. Thus, "Ye *would* not come to me," or "Ye *did* not come to me that ye *might* have life," is entirely grammatical. In either of these instances, to use the present tense would be erroneous. When the first verb is in the preterperfect, or the present perfect, as some call it, because it has a reference both to the past



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and to the present, the second, I imagine, may be in either tense. Thus, "Ye *have not come* to me that ye *might*, or that ye *may* have life," seem equally unexceptionable.

In expressing abstract and universal truths, the present tense of the verb ought to be used, because it has no relation to time in such cases, but serves as a copula to the two terms of the preposition. "Have made a discovery that there *was* no God"; properly *is*.

The third example shall be of a wrong mood. "If thou *bring* thy gift to the altar, and there *rememberest* that thy brother has ought against thee." The construction of the two verbs *bring* and *rememberest* ought to be the same, as they are both under the regimen of the conjunction *if*. Yet the one is in the subjunctive mood, the other in the indicative.

The fourth instance shall be the omission of an essential part of one of the complex tenses, the writer apparently referring to a part of the verb occurring in a former clause of the sentence, altho the part referred to will not supply the defect but some other part not produced. Of this the following is an example: "I shall do all I can to persuade others to *take* the same measures for their cure which I *have*." Here we have a reference in the end to the preceding verb *take*. Yet it is not the word *take* which will supply the sense, but *taken*. This participle, therefore, ought to have been added.

The fifth specimen in the verbs shall be of a faulty reference to a part to be mentioned. "This dedication may serve for almost any book that has, is, or shall be published." Has in this place is merely part of a complex tense; you can not say "any book that *has* published," or, "has *be* published." The phrase should read, "That has been or shall be published." The word *is* should be expunged as adding nothing to the sense.

"Will it be urged that the four gospels are *as old*, or even *older than tradition*." The words *as old* and *older* can not have a common regimen; the one requires to be followed by the conjunction *as*, the other by *than*. *As old as* tradition, and even *older*, would have been right.

The same inaccuracy in the construction of verbs. "It requires few talents *to which* most men are not *born*, or at least *may not acquire*"; better thus, "or *which* at least *they may not acquire*." There is an error of the same kind in this sentence, "The Court of Chancery frequently *mitigates*, and breaks the teeth of the common law." The regimen is absurd here; "*and breaks the teeth of*" should be expunged. "Give the Whigs but power enough to insult their sovereign, engross his favors to themselves, and to oppress and plunder their fellow subjects; they presently *grow* into good humor and *good language* toward the crown." Men may grow good hu-



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mored, but *grow into good language* is insufferable.

I shall add to these an instance in the syntax of nouns. "There is never wanting a set of evil instruments, who either *out of mad zeal*, private hatred, or *filthy lucre*, are always ready." Some men act sometimes out of mad zeal and private hatred, but it is not English to say they act out of filthy lucre. The following is of the same class: "There is one that will think herself obliged to double her '*kindness* and *caresses* of me.'" The word *kindness* requires to be followed by either *to* or *for*, and can not be construed with the preposition *of*.

We often find something irregular in the management of the prepositions; for instance, in the omission of one altogether: "He lamented the fatal mistake the world had been so long *in* using silk-worms." Another *in* is necessary to complete the construction, whether we suppose the *in* mentioned to belong to the preceding words, or to the succeeding. But as it would have sounded harshly to subjoin another *in* immediately after the former, it would have been better to give the sentence another turn, as "He lamented the fatal mistake *in* which the world had been so long *in* using silk-worms."

We have a similar omission, tho not of a preposition, in the expression following: "That the discoursing on politics shall be

looked upon *as dull as talking on the weather.*” Syntax absolutely requires that the sentence in this form should have another *as* immediately before the first. At the same time, it must be owned that this would render the expression very inelegant. This dilemma might have been avoided by giving another turn to the concluding part, as thus, “shall be looked upon as equally dull with talking on the weather.”

An error in the choice of a preposition: “The greatest masters of critical learning differ *among one another*”; differ *among themselves* would be right.

Inaccuracy in conjunctions: “A petty constable will *neither* act cheerfully or wisely.” Properly, “act *neither* cheerfully *nor* wisely.” Neither can not, grammatically, be followed by *or*. Incorrectness in adverbs: “Lest I should be charged for being worse than my word, I shall endeavor to satisfy my reader by pursuing my method proposed, if *peradventure* he can call to mind what that method was.” The adverb *peradventure*, expressing a degree of evidence or credibility, can not regularly be construed with the hypothetical conjunction *if*. It is only to affirmations and negations, not to bare suppositions, that all the adverbs denoting certainty, probability, or possibility properly belong.

The following passage in the common version of the Bible is subject to the same cen-

sure: "Micaiah said, '*if thou certainly* return in peace, then hath not the Lord spoken by me.'" The translators in this, as in some other places, have been misled by a well-meant attempt to express the force of a Hebraism, which often can not be exprest in English.

I shall conclude this article with a quotation from an excellent author, of which, indeed, it would not be easy to say in what part the solecism may be discovered, the whole passage being so perfectly solecistical: "As he that would keep his house in repair must attend every little breach or flaw, and supply it immediately, else time alone will bring all to ruin; how much more the common accidents of storms and rain? He must live in perpetual danger of his house falling about his ears; and will find it cheaper to throw it quite down, and build it again from the ground, perhaps upon a new foundation, or at least in a new form, which may neither be safe nor so convenient as the old." It is impossible to analyze this sentence grammatically, or to say whether it be one sentence or more. It seems by the conjunction *as* to begin with a comparison, but we have not a single hint of the subject illustrated. Besides, the introducing of the interrogation, "how much more?" after *else*, which could be regularly followed by an affirmation or negation, and the incoherency of the next clause, "*he must live,*" render it, indeed, all of a piece.

So much for the solecism, of which examples might be multiplied without end. Purity of expression has but a small share of merit, but purity of expression contributes to elegance of composition and rhetorical delivery.

### IMPROPRIETY

I come now to consider the third and last class of faults against purity, to which I gave the name of *impropriety*. The barbarism is an offense against etymology, the solecism against syntax, their impropriety against lexicography. The business of the lexicographer is to assign to every word of the language the precise meaning or meanings which use has assigned to it. To do this is the grammarian's province, tho commonly executed by a different hand as etymology and syntax. As words may be misapplied, and employed as signs of things to which use has not affixt them, the following rules will direct us to avoid improprieties in single words or in phrases.

#### Impropriety in Single Words

Improprieties from resemblance or proximity in sound. It is by proximity in sound that several are misled to use the word *observation* for *observance*, as when they speak of the religious observation of a festival for the religious observance of it. Both words spring from the root *observe*, but in different signifi-

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cations. When to observe signifies to *remark*, the verbal noun is *observation*; when it signifies to *obey* or to *keep*, the verbal is *observance*.

By a similar mistake *endurance* has been used for *duration*, and confounded with it; whereas its proper sense is patience. It is derived from the active verb to endure, which signifies to *suffer*, and not from the neuter, which signifies to *last*. In the days of Queen Elizabeth the word *endurance* was synonymous with *duration*, whereas now it is in this acceptation obsolete. Nay, even in a later period, about the middle of the last century, several words were used synonymously which we now invariably discriminate. Such are the terms *state* and *estate*, *property* and *propriety*, *import* and *importance*, *conscience* and *consciousness*, *arrant* and *errant*.

Human and *humane* are sometimes confounded, tho the only authorized sense of the former is, belonging to *man*; of the latter, kind and compassionate. *Humanly* is improperly put for *humanely* in these lines of Pope:

Tho' learn'd, well-bred; and tho' well-bred, sincere;  
Modestly bold, and *humanly* severe.

The abstract noun *humanity* is equally adapted to both senses.

The adjectives *ceremonious* and *ceremonial* are sometimes used promiscuously. Ceremoni-

ous signifies *a form of civility*; ceremonial a *religious rite*. We never say *constructing* a sentence when we speak of the disposition of its words, but *construing*. We never hear of *construing* a fabric, but *constructing* a building. Academic and academician are widely different; sophist and sophister are not the same; the former is a teacher, the latter a false reasoner.

“To *demean* one’s self” has been improperly used by some writers, misled by the sound of the second syllable, for “to *debase* one’s self,” or “to behave meanly”; whereas the verb *to demean* implies no more than the verb *to behave*. Both require an adverb or something equivalent to enable them to express whether the demeanor or behavior is good or bad, noble or mean.

*E’er*, a contraction of the adverb *ever*, has from a resemblance, or rather an identity in sound, been mistaken for the conjunction *ere*, before; and in like manner *its*, the genitive, of the pronoun *it*, for *’tis*, a contraction of *it is*.

In the same way *bad* is sometimes very improperly used for *bade*, the preterit of the verb *bid*, and *sate* for *sat*, the preterit of *sit*. The only proper use of the word *bad* is as a synonym for *ill*, and to *sate* is the same signification as *to glut*.

The word *genii* is erroneously used for *geniuses*; but the former is the plural of



*genius*, a demon; the latter means persons of *genius*. Brothers means children of the same parents; *brethren* men of the same profession, religion, or nation.

Improprieties arising from similitude in sense, as *veracity* for *reality*. In strict propriety the word is only applicable to persons, and signifies not physical but moral truth.

There is no sort of joy more grateful to the mind of man than that "which ariseth from the *invention* of truth." For invention he ought to have said *discovery*.

*Epithet* hath been used corruptly to denote *title* or *appellation*; whereas it only signifies some attribute exprest by an adjective.

In the same way, *verdict* has been made to usurp the place of testimony; and the word *risible* has been perverted from its original sense, which is *capable of laughing*, to denote *ridiculous*, *laughable*, or *fit to be laughed at*. Hence these new-fangled phrases, *risible jests* and *risible absurdities*. The proper discrimination between *risible* and *ridiculous* is, that the former has an active, the latter a passive signification. Thus we say, "Man is a *risible* animal," "A fop is a *ridiculous* character." To substitute the former instead of the latter, and say, "A fop is a *risible* character," is no better English than to substitute the latter instead of the former and say, "Man is a *ridiculous* animal." In confirmation of this distinction, it may be further remarked that

the abstract *risibility*, which analogically ought to determine the import of the concrete, is still limited to its original and active sense, the *faculty of laughter*. Where our language has provided us with distinct names for the active, verbal and the passive, as no distinction is more useful for preventing ambiguity, so no distinction ought to be more sacredly observed.

The word *together* often supplies the place of *successively*, as "I do not remember that I ever spoke three sentences *together* in my whole life"—*three sentences successively in my life*. The word *everlasting* has been employed to denote time without beginning, tho it properly denotes time without end, as, "From *everlasting* to *everlasting* thou art God." The proper expression is, "From *eternity* to *eternity* thou art God." The words *certain* and *manifest* are often equivocally used for *apparent*. Both etymology and the most frequent use lead us so directly to the signification *seeming* as opposed to *real*, or *visible* as opposed to *concealed*, that, at first, we are always in hazard of mistaking it. For the same reason I do not like the phrase *to make appear* (tho a very common one) for *to prove*, *to evince*, *to show*. By the aid of sophistry a man may make a thing *appear* to be what it is not. This is very different from showing what it is.

*Abundance* in the following quotation is,



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I imagine, improperly used for a *great deal*. "I will only mention that passage of the buskins, which after *abundance* of persuasion, you would hardly suffer to be cut from your legs."

The word *due* in the citation subjoined is not only improperly but preposterously employed. "What right the first observers of nature and instructors of mankind had to the title of sages we can not say. It was *due* perhaps more to the ignorance of the scholars than to knowledge of the masters." *Due* is here used for *owing*. The sentence should read, "It took its rise, perhaps, more from the ignorance of the scholars than from the knowledge of the masters."

*Falseness*, in a moral sense, denotes want of veracity, and is applied to persons; it must not be used for *falsity* or *falsehood*, which are applicable to things. *Falsity* denotes contrariety to truth; *falsehood* an untrue assertion. *Negligence* implies a habit; *neglect* denotes an act. We can not say, "The negligence of this leaves us exposed," but "The neglect of this," etc.

Precisely of the same kind is the misapplication of the word *conscience* in this quotation: "The *conscience* of approving one's self a benefactor to mankind is the noblest recompense for being so." Properly the *consciousness*; the former denotes the faculty, the latter a particular exertion.

This impropriety is reversed in the citation following: "I apprehend that all the *sophism* which has been, or can be employed, will not be sufficient to acquit this system at the tribunal of reason." For *sophism* he should have said *sophistry*; this denotes fallacious reasoning, that only a fallacious argument.

Sometimes the neuter verb is mistaken for the active. "What Tully says of war may be applied to disputing; it should be always so managed as to *remember* that the only end of it is peace." Properly *remind us*.

Sometimes again, the active verb is mistaken for the neuter. "I may say, without vanity, that there is not a gentleman in England better read in tombstones than myself, my studies having *laid* very much in churchyards." Properly *lain*. The use of the active verb *lay* for the neuter *lie* is peculiar to the Cockney idiom.

The word *plenty* used adjectively for *plentiful* is a gross vulagrism. Nobody says "the beasts by *whom* they are hunted," but the beasts by *which*. The word *precept* is sometimes used for *doctrine*, as, "I firmly believe the divine *precept*." We are required to *believe* the *doctrines* of our religion, and to *obey* its *precepts*. "Their success may be compared to that of a certain prince, who placed, it is said, cats and other animals adored by the Egyptians in front of his army when he invaded that people. A reverence for these

*phantoms* made the Egyptians lay down their arms and become an easy conquest." What the author here intended to say it is hard to conjecture; but it is unquestionable that in no sense whatever can cats and other animals be called *phantoms*.

The genuine source of the *vulgarism* seems to be the affectation of an easy, familiar and careless manner; it is conquered by discipline and the study of good authors. A desire for novelty is sure to corrupt the style of young persons; and a paucity of ideas is not supplied by a superabundance of words. He that deserts the common road, to deck himself in the glitter of stolen jewels, will not long shine. Nor will a house be well furnished when the utensils are superfluous. The same observations are applicable to language: the riches of language have their limits; and, if you will enjoy them to advantage, be careful to procure them lawfully and to use them wisely.

### Impropriety in Phrases

I come now to consider the improprieties which occur in phrases. The first of this kind of which I shall take notice is, when the expression, on being grammatically analyzed, is discovered to contain some inconsistency. Such is the phrase *of all others* after the superlative, common with many English writers. Interpreted by the rules of syntax, it implies that a thing is different from itself. Take these

words for an example, "It celebrates the Church of England as the *most* perfect of *all others*." Properly, either "as more perfect than any other," or "as the most perfect of all churches."

Sometimes, through mere inattention, slips of this kind are committed; as "I do not reckon that we want a genius more than *the rest of our neighbors*." The impropriety is corrected by omitting the words in italics. Another oversight of Swift is the following: "I had like to have gotten *one or two* broken heads for impertinence," for "once or twice my head was likely to have been broken." The Dean had but *one head*. A passage formerly quoted is liable to the same criticism: "The first project was to shorten discourse by cutting polysyllables into one." One thing may be cut into two or more, but it is inconceivable that by cutting, two or more things should be made one.

Another, still from the same hand, "I solemnly declare that I have not *wilfully* committed the least *mistake*." The words used here are incompatible: a wrong wilfully committed is no mistake.

I shall next illustrate those by which an author is made to say one thing when he means another. Of this kind I shall produce only one example at present, as I shall have occasion afterward of considering the same fault under the head of perspicuity. "I will

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instance in one opinion, which I look upon every man obliged in conscience to quit, or in prudence to conceal; I mean, that whoever argues in defense of absolute power in a single person, tho he offers the old plausible plea, that it is his opinion, which he can not help, unless he be convinced, ought in all free states to be treated as the common enemy of mankind." If the author says anything, he says, that whoever thinks that the advocates for absolute power ought to be treated as common enemies, is obliged to quit or conceal his opinion; a sentiment very different from the scope of the discourse, which, it is evident, says, that whoever has it for his opinion that a single person is entitled to absolute authority ought to quit or conceal that opinion, because, otherwise, he will, in a free state, deserve to be treated as a common enemy.

There is a slight incongruity in the combination of the words in these sentences: "When you fall *into a man's conversation*, the first thing you should consider is." Properly, "fall into conversation with a man." "I wish, sir, you would animadvert frequently on the false taste *the town is in*, with relation to plays as well as operas." Properly, "the false taste of the town." "The presence of the Deity, and the *care* such an august *cause* is to be supposed to *take about any action*." The impropriety here is best corrected by substituting the word *being* in the place of

*cause*; for tho there be nothing improper in calling the Deity an august Cause, the author has very improperly connected with this appellative some words totally unsuitable; for who ever heard of a *cause taking care about an action?*

I shall produce but one other instance: "Neither implies that there are virtuous habits and accomplishments already *attained* by the *possessor*, but they certainly show an *unprejudiced* capacity *toward* them." In the first clause of this sentence there is a gross inconsistency; we are informed of habits and accomplishments that are *possest*, but not *attained*. In the second clause there is a double impropriety: the participial adjective is not suited to the substantive with which it is construed, or is the subsequent preposition expressive of the sense. Supposing, then, that the word *possessor* has been used inadvertently for *person*, or some other general term, the sense may be exhibited thus: "Neither implies that there are virtuous habits and accomplishments already attained by this person; but they certainly show that his mind is not prejudiced against them, and that it has a capacity of attaining them."

Under this head I might consider that impropriety which results from the use of metaphors, or other tropes, wherein the similitude to the subject, or connection with it, is too remote; also, that which results from the



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construction of words with any trope which are not applicable in the literal sense. The former errs chiefly against vivacity, the latter against elegance. Of the one, therefore, I shall have occasion to speak when I consider the *catachresis*, of the other when I treat of *mixed metaphor*.

I have now finished what was intended on the subject of grammatical purity, the first, and, in some respect, the most essential of all virtues of elocution. I have illustrated the three different ways in which it may be violated: the *barbarism*, when the words employed are not English; the *solecism*, when the construction is not English; the *impropriety*, when the meaning in which any English word or phrase is used by a writer or speaker is not the sense which good use has assigned to it.





CHAPTER IV  
OF THE QUALITIES OF STYLE  
STRICTLY RHETORICAL



## CHAPTER IV

### OF THE QUALITIES OF STYLE STRICTLY RHETORICAL

**P**URITY may be denominated grammatical truth. It consists in the conformity of the expression to the sentiment which the speaker or the writer intends to convey by it, as moral truth consists in the conformity of the sentiment intended to be conveyed, to the sentiment actually entertained by the speaker or the writer, and logical truth in the conformity of the sentiment to the nature of things. The opposite to logical truth is *error*; to moral truth, *a lie*; to grammatical truth, *a blunder in language*. The only standard by which the conformity implied in grammatical truth must be ascertained in any language is reputable, national and present use in that language.

But it is with the expression as with the sentiment; it is not enough to the orator that both be true. A sentence may be a just exhibition, according to the rules of the language, of the thought intended to be conveyed by it, and may, therefore, to a mere grammarian be unexceptionable, which to an orator may appear extremely faulty. It may, nevertheless, be obscure, it may be languid, it may be

inelegant, it may be flat, it may be unmusical. It is not ultimately the justness either of the thought or of the expression which is the aim of the orator; but it is a certain effect to be produced in the hearers. This effect, as he purposes to produce in them by means of language, which he makes the instrument of conveying his sentiments into their minds, he must take care in the first place that his style be perspicuous, that so he may be understood. If he would not only inform the understanding, but please the imagination, he must add the charms of vivacity and elegance, corresponding from the two sources from which, as was observed in the beginning of this work, the merit of an address of this kind results. By vivacity, resemblance is attained; by elegance, dignity of manner. The dignity of the subject concerns solely the thought. If he proposes to work on the passions, his very diction as well as his sentiments must be animated. Thus, language and thought, like soul and body, are made to correspond, and the qualities of the one exactly cooperate with those of the other. The body, besides its fitness for serving the purposes of the soul, is capable of one peculiar excellence as a visible object. The excellence I mean is *beauty*, which evidently implies more than what results from the fitness of the several organs and members for answering their respective ends. That there is a beauty in the perceived fitness

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of means to their end and instruments to their use is incontrovertible. This, however, is not the whole that is implied in the term beauty. The eyes of one person may be less brilliant than those of another, tho equally fit for all the purposes of vision. The like may be said of all other features. Analogous to this there is an excellence of which language is susceptible as an audible object, distinct from its aptitude for conveying the sentiments of the orator with light and energy into the minds of the hearers. Now, as the *music* is to the ear what *beauty* is to the eye, I shall, for want of a more proper term, denominate this excellence in style its music, tho I acknowledge the word is rarely used with so great latitude.

Thus it appears, that beside *purity*, which is a quality entirely grammatical, the five simple and original qualities of style, considered as an object to the understanding, the imagination, the passions and the ear, are *perspicuity*, *vivacity*, *elegance*, *animation* and *music*.



CHAPTER V  
OF PERSPICUITY





## CHAPTER V

### OF PERSPICUITY

OF ALL the qualities above mentioned the first and most essential is *perspicuity*. Every speaker does not propose to please the imagination, nor is every subject susceptible of those ornaments which conduce to this purpose. Much less is it the aim of every speech to agitate the passions. There are some occasions, therefore, on which vivacity, and many on which animation of style are not necessary; nay, there are occasions on which the last especially would be improper. But whatever be the ultimate intention of the orator, to inform, to convince, to please, to move, or to persuade, still he must speak so as to be understood, or he speaks to no purpose. Whether the intellect be or be not immediately address by the speaker, it must be regarded by him either ultimately or subordinately—ultimately when the direct purpose of the discourse is information or conviction; subordinately when the end is pleasure, emotion or persuasion.

In a discourse wherein either vivacity or animation is admitted, it is not every sentence that requires them, but every sentence must be perspicuous. All other qualities of style

are lost without this. This is to the understanding what light is to the eye, and ought to be diffused over the whole performance, if language were capable of absolute perfection, which it evidently is not; if words and things could be rendered exact counterparts to each other; if every different thing in nature had a different symbol by which it were expressed, and every difference in the relations of things had a corresponding difference in the combinations of words, purity alone would secure perspicuity, or rather, these two would entirely coincide. To speak grammatically would, in that case, convey infallibly and perspicuously the full meaning of the speaker, if he had any meaning, into the mind of every hearer who perfectly understands the language. There would not be even a possibility of mistake or doubt. But the case is widely different with all the languages that ever were, are, or that ever will be in the world.

Grammatical purity in every tongue conduces greatly to perspicuity, but it will by no means secure it. A man may, in respect of it, speak unexceptionably, and yet speak obscurely, or ambiguously; and tho we can not say that a man may speak properly, and at the same time speak unintelligibly, yet this last case falls more naturally to be considered as an offense against perspicuity than as a violation of propriety. When the meaning is not discovered the particular impropriety can not

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be pointed out. In the three different ways just mentioned perspicuity may be violated.

### The Obscure from Defect

This is the first offense against perspicuity, and may arise from several causes. First, from some defect in the expression. There are in all languages certain elliptical expressions, which use has established, and which, therefore, very rarely occasion darkness. When they do occasion it they ought always to be avoided. Such are, in Greek and Latin, the frequent suppression of the substantive verb and of the possessive pronoun; I was going to add, and of the personal pronouns also, but, on reflection, I am sensible that in the omission of them in the nominative there is properly no ellipsis, as the verb by its inflection actually expresses them. Accordingly, in these languages, the pronoun in the nominative is never rightly introduced, unless when it is emphatical. But the idiom of most modern tongues, English and French particularly, will seldom admit such ellipsis. In Italian and Spanish they are pretty frequent.

Often, indeed, the affectation of conciseness, often the rapidity of thought natural to some writers, will give rise to still more material defects in the expression. Examples: "He is inspired with a true *sense of that function.*" *Sense* here implies inward feeling, and a function can not be felt. "He is inspired with a

true sense of the dignity of that function," is the expression without any defect. "You ought to contemn all the wit in the world against you." More plainly thus, "All the wit that can be employed against you." "A savage is a happier state of life than a slave at the oar." Neither savage nor slave can be denominated a state of life, tho the states in which they live may properly be compared. "This courage among the adversaries of the court," says the same writer in another piece, "was inspired into them by various incidents, for every one of which I think the ministers, or, if that was the case, the minister alone is to answer." If that was the case, pray what is he supposing to have been the case? To the relative *that* I can find no antecedent, and am left to guess that he means *if there was but one minister*.

The same evil may be occasioned by excess. This offends against vivacity, and produces darkness. We will consider it afterward. Another cause of obscurity is a bad choice of words. When it is this which renders the sentence obscure, there is always ground for the charge of impropriety.

#### Obscurity from Bad Arrangement

Another source of obscurity is a bad arrangement of the words. In this case the construction is not sufficiently clear. One often, on first hearing the sentence, imagines,

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from the turn of it, that it ought to be construed one way, and on reflection finds that he must construe it another way. Of this, which is a blemish too common even in the style of our best writers, I shall produce a few examples: "It contained," says Swift, "a warrant for conducting me and my retinue to Traldragdubb or Trildrogdrib, for it is pronounced both ways, as near as I can remember, *by a party of ten horse.*" The words *by a party of ten horse* must be construed with the participle *conducting*, but they are placed so far from this word, and so near the verb *pronounced*, that at first they suggest a meaning perfectly ludicrous. "I perceived it had been scoured *with half an eye.*" Did he perceive with half an eye? or, did half an eye scour it? "I have hopes that when Will confronts him, *and all the ladies in whose behalf he engages him* cast kind looks and wishes at their champion, he will have some chance." The first part of the sentence suggests that Will is to confront all the ladies, but afterward we find it necessary to construe this clause with the following verb. This confusion is removed at once by repeating the adverb *when*, as, "I have hopes that when Will confronts him, and when all the ladies cast kind looks," etc.

Perspicuity originally and properly implies transparency, such as may be ascribed to air, glass, water, or any other medium through which material objects are viewed. Applied

metaphorically to language, it indicates the medium through which we perceive the sentiments of others. If in corporeal things the medium be perfectly transparent, our whole attention is fixt on the subject, and we scarcely perceive that any medium intervenes. If there be any flaw in the medium, if it be dim, the object will be imperfectly represented; our attention will be taken from it and placed on the medium. The case of language is precisely similar. A discourse, then, exceeds in perspicuity when the subjects wholly engross the hearer, and the diction is so little minded by him that he can scarcely be said to be conscious that it is the medium of the speaker's thoughts. On the contrary, the least obscurity, ambiguity, or confusion of style instantly removes the attention from the sentiment to the expression, and the hearer endeavors, by the aid of reflection, to comprehend the imperfections of the speaker's language.

So much for obviating the objections which are frequently raised against such remarks as I have already made, and shall probably hereafter make on the subject of language. The elements which enter into the composition of the hugest bodies are subtile and inconsiderable. The rudiments of every art and science exhibit at first, to a learner, the appearance of littleness and insignificance. And it is by attending to such reflections as to a superficial observer would appear minute and hy-



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percritical, that language must be improved and eloquence perfected.

I return to the causes of obscurity, and shall only further observe, concerning the effect of bad arrangement, that it generally obscures the sense, even when it does not, as in the preceding instances, suggest a wrong construction. Of this the following will suffice for an example: "The young man did not want natural talents; but the father of him was a coxcomb, who affected being a fine gentleman so unmercifully that he could not *endure* in his sight, or the frequent *mention of one*, who was his son, growing into manhood, and thrusting him out of the gay world." It is not easy to disentangle the construction of this sentence. One is at a loss at first to find any accusative to the active verb *endure*; on further examination it is discovered to have two, the words *mention* and *one*. The word *unmercifully* is vilely applied. The passage may be justly chargeable with *solecism, impropriety, obscurity and inelegance*.

### Obscurity Arising from the Use of the Same Word in Different Senses

This error is exemplified in the following quotation: "That he should be in earnest it is hard to conceive, since any reasons of doubt which he might have in this case would have been reasons of doubt in the case of other men who may give *more*, but can not give more *evi-*



*dent, signs* of thought to their fellow creatures." This errs alike against perspicuity and elegance. The word *more* is first an adjective, the comparative of *many*; in an instant it is an adverb, and the sign of the comparative degree. As the reader is not apprized of this, the sentence must appear to him, on the first glance, a flat contradiction. Perspicuously either thus: "Who may give *more numerous*, but can not give *more evident* signs," or thus, "Who may give *more*, but can not give *clearer* signs."

It is but seldom that the same pronoun can be used twice or oftener in the same sentence in reference to different things without darkening the expression. It is necessary to observe here that the signification of the personal, as well as of the relative pronouns, and even of the adverbs of time and place, must be determined by the things to which they relate. To use them, therefore, with reference to different things is in effect to employ the same word in different senses, which, when it occurs in the same sentence, or in sentences closely connected, is rarely found entirely compatible with perspicuity. Of this I shall give some examples. "One may have an air *which* proceeds from a just sufficiency and knowledge of the matter before him, *which* may naturally produce some motions of his head and body, *which* might become the bench better than the bar." The pronoun *which* is

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here thrice used in three several senses; and it must require reflection to discover that the first denotes an *air*, the second *sufficiency and knowledge*, and the third *motions of the head and body*. Such is the use of the pronouns *those* and *who* in the following sentence: "The sharks *who* prey upon the inadvertency of young heirs are more pardonable than *those* who trespass upon the good opinion of *those* who treat them upon the footing of choice and respect." The sentence is obscure, inelegant, unmusical. The like use of the pronoun *they* in the following sentence almost occasions an ambiguity: "*They* were persons of such moderate intellects, even before *they* were impaired by *their* passion." The pronoun *it* often repeated may create obscurity.

### From an Uncertain Reference in Pronouns and Relatives

A cause of obscurity also arising from the use of pronouns and relatives is when it does not appear at first to what they refer. Of this fault I shall give the three following instances: "There are other examples," says Bolingbroke, "of the same kind, which can not be brought without the utmost horror, because in them it is supposed impiously, against principles as self-evident as any of those necessary truths, which are *such* of all knowledge, that the Supreme Being commands by one law what He forbids by another." It

is not so clear as it ought to be what is the antecedent to *such*. Another from the same author: "The laws of Nature are truly what my Lord Bacon styles his aphorisms, laws of laws. Civil laws are always imperfect, and often false deductions from *them*, or applications of them; nay, they stand in many instances in direct opposition to *them*." It is not quite obvious, on the first reading, that the pronoun *them* in this passage always refers to the laws of Nature, and *they* to civil laws.

#### Obscurity Arising from too Artificial a Structure of the Sentences

Another cause of obscurity arises from a sentence too much complicated, or when the sense is suspended by parenthesis. Some critics think parenthesis ought to be discarded as creating obscurity. This is a mistake; short parenthesis are perfectly justifiable. Others use commas in place of the *hooks* of the parenthesis, and thus fall into another error. This may therefore be more justly denominated a corruption in writing than an improvement. Punctuation, it will readily be acknowledged, is of considerable assistance to the reading and pronunciation. No part of a sentence requires to be distinguished by the manner of pronouncing it more than a parenthesis, and consequently no part of a sentence ought to be more distinctly marked in the pointing.

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### Obscurity from Technical Terms

Another source of darkness in composing is the injudicious introduction of technical words and phrases, as in the following passage:

Tack to thé larboard and stand off to sea,  
Veer starboard, sea and land—

What an absurd profusion, in an epic poem, too, of terms which few beside seamen understand! In strict propriety, technical words should not be considered as belonging to the language because not in current use, nor understood by the generality even of readers. They are but the peculiar dialect of a particular class. When those of that class only are addrest, as in treatises on the principles of their art, it is admitted that the use of such terms may be not only convenient but even necessary. It is allowable also in ridicule, if used sparingly, as in comedy and romance.

### Obscurity from Long Sentences

Long sentences usually contain some of the faults already noticed. When a long sentence is free from obscurity it may always be remarked that the principal members of the period are similar in their structure, and would constitute so many distinct sentences if they were united by their reference to some common clause in the beginning or the end.

## THE DOUBLE MEANING

When perspicuity is violated by the *double meaning* the sentence conveys also some other meaning, which is not the author's; his words are susceptible of more than one interpretation. This fault arises from the use of equivocal expressions, or by ranging the words so that the construction is equivocal, or exhibits different senses. The former we name equivocation, the latter ambiguity.

### Equivocation

The word equivocation in common language is synonymous with *a lie*.

This offense falls under the reproof of the moralist, not the censure of the rhetorician. Again, when the word denotes, as agreeably to etymology it may denote, that exercise of wit which consists in the playful use of any term or phrase in different senses, and is denominated *pun*, it is amenable indeed to the tribunal of criticism, but can not be regarded as a violation of the laws of perspicuity. It is neither with the liar nor with the punster that I am concerned at present. The only species of equivocation that comes under reprehension here is that which takes place when an author undesignedly employs an expression susceptible of a sense different from the sense he intends to convey by it.

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Equivocal terms should ever be avoided when we design to speak plain and in truth.

To begin with particles, the preposition *of* denotes sometimes the relation which any affection bears to its subject, sometimes the relation it bears to its object. Hence this expression of the apostle is reckoned equivocal: "I am perused that neither death nor life shall be able to separate us from the love of God." By *the love of God*, say interpreters, may be understood either *God's love to us*, or *our love to God*. The genitive case in the ancient languages, and the prepositions corresponding to that case in the modern languages, are alike susceptible of this double meaning. In our own language the preposition *of* is more commonly put before the subject, and *to* before the object of the passion. But this is not the only way in which the preposition *of* may be equivocal; as it sometimes denotes the relation of the effect to the cause, sometimes that of the accident to the subject; from this duplicity of signification there will also, in certain circumstances, arise a double sense. You have an example in these words of Swift: "A little after the reformation *of* Luther." It may, indeed, be doubted whether this should not rather be called an impropriety, since *the reformation of a man* will suggest much more readily a change wrought *on* the man than a change wrought *by* him. And the former of these senses it could not more read-



ily suggest if the expression in that sense were not more conformable to use.

My next instance shall be in the conjunction: "They are both much more ancient among the Persians than Zoroaster or Zerdusht. The *or* here is equivocal, for Zoroaster and Zerdusht are the names of one and the same person.

The following is an example in the pronouns: "She united the great body of the people in *her* and their common interest." The word *her* may be either the possessive pronoun, or the accusative case of the personal pronoun. A very small alteration in the order totally removes the doubt. Say, "in their and *her* common interest." The word *her* thus connected can be only the possessive, as the author doubtless intended it should be, in the passage quoted.

An example in substantives: "Your majesty has lost all hopes of any future excises by their *consumption*." The word *consumption* has both an active sense and a passive. It means either the act of consuming or the state of being consumed. Clearly thus: "Your majesty has lost all hopes of levying any future excises on what they shall consume."

In adjectives: "As for such animals as are *mortal* or noxious, we have a right to destroy them." The word *mortal*, therefore, in this sentence, might justly be considered as im-



proper, for tho it sometimes means destructive or causing death, it is then almost invariably joined with some noun expressive of hurt or danger. Thus we say, a *mortal poison*, a *mortal wound*; but the phrases *mortal creature*, *mortal animal*, or *mortal man* are always understood to imply *creature*, *animal*, or *man* liable to *death*.

In verbs: "The next refuge was to say, it was *overlooked* by one man, and many passages wholly written by another." The word *overlooked* means sometimes *neglected*, sometimes *revised*. It means the latter in the sentence before us. Another instance in verbs is this: "I have long since learned to like nothing but what you *do*." You *like* would have been correct.

### Ambiguity

I come now to consider that species of *double meaning* which arises, not from the use of equivocal terms, but solely from the construction, and which I have therefore distinguished by the name of *ambiguity*. This, of all the faults against perspicuity, is, in all languages, the most difficult to avoid. There is not one of the parts of speech which may not be so placed that, agreeably to the rules of grammar, it may be construed with different parts of the sentence, and by consequence made to exhibit different senses. Besides, a writer intent upon his subject is less apt to

advert to those imperfections in his style which occasion ambiguity than to any other; as no term or phrase he employs does of itself suggest the false meaning, a manner of construing his words different from that which is expressive of his sentiment, will not so readily occur to his thoughts; and yet this erroneous manner of construing them may be most obvious to the reader.

The ambiguity of pronouns is ascertained by the antecedent to which they refer, as, "Solomon, the son of David, *who* built the temple of Jerusalem, was the richest monarch that ever reigned over the people of God"; and "Solomon, the son of David, *who* was persecuted by Saul, was the richest monarch." In these two sentences the *who* is similarly situated; yet in the former it relates to the person first mentioned; in the latter, to the second. In such cases we ought to give the sentence another turn, and say, instead of the first, "Solomon, the son of David, and the builder of the temple of Jerusalem, was the richest monarch." The conjunction *and* makes the following words relate entirely to Solomon, as nothing had been affirmed concerning David. It is more difficult to avoid the ambiguity in the other instance, without adopting some circumlocution that will flatten the expression. For the second, we might read, "Solomon, whose father David was persecuted by Saul, was the richest."

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The relatives *who, which, that, whose, whom*, often create ambiguity when there can be no doubt in regard to the antecedent. These pronouns are sometimes *explicative*, sometimes *determinative*; they are explicative when they serve merely for the illustration of the subject; they are determinative when they limit the import of the antecedent; and the definite article is of great use for discriminating the explicative sense from the determinative. Example of explicative pronouns: "Man who is born of woman, is of few days and full of trouble." "Godliness, which with contentment is great gain, has the promise both of the present life and of the future." The clauses, "who is born of woman," and "which with great contentment is great gain," point to certain properties in the antecedents, but do not restrict their signification. For, should we omit these clauses altogether, we could say with equal truth, "Man is of few days and full of trouble." "Godliness has the promise both of the present life and of the future."

Examples of determinative pronouns: "The man that endureth to the end, shall be saved." "The remorse which issues in reformation is true repentance." Each of the relatives here confines the signification of its antecedent to such only as are possest of the qualification mentioned. For it is not affirmed of every man that he shall be saved, nor of all remorse that it is true repentance.

Ambiguity in the use of the pronoun *his*: "Lisias promised to his father never to abandon *his* friends." Whose friends? His own or his father's? If his father's, then read, "Lisias, speaking of his father's friends, promised to his father never to abandon them"; or thus, Lisias gave a promise to his father in these words, "I will never abandon *your* friends." If his own friends, then read, "Lisias, speaking of his friends, promised to his father never to abandon them," or, "I will never abandon *my* friends."

The pronoun *he* is often ambiguous. In such a case we ought always either to give another turn to the expression, or to use the noun itself, and not the pronoun, for when the repetition of a word is necessary it is not offensive, as: "We said to my Lord, the lad can not leave his father, for if he should leave his father, his father should die." The words *his father* are in this short verse thrice repeated, and yet are not disagreeable, as they contribute to perspicuity. Had the last part of the sentence run thus: "If he should leave his father, he 'would die,'" it would not have appeared from the expression whether it was the child or the parent that would die.

There is in adjectives a great risk of ambiguity when they are not joined to the substantives to which they belong. This arises from our adjectives being without gender, number, and declension. Their relation, there-

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fore, for the most part, is not otherwise to be ascertained but by their place. The following sentence will serve for an example: "God heapeth favors on His servants ever liberal and faithful." Is it God or His servants that are liberal and faithful? If the former, say "God, ever liberal and faithful, heapeth favors on His servants." If the latter, say, either "God heapeth favors on His ever liberal and faithful servants," or "His servants, who are ever liberal and faithful." There is another frequent cause of ambiguity in the use of adjectives which has been, as yet, in our language, very little attended to. Two or more are sometimes made to refer to the same substantive, when, in fact, they do not belong to the same thing, but to different things, which being of the same kind, are express by the same generic name. I explain myself by an example: "Both the ecclesiastic and secular powers concurred in those measures." Here the two adjectives, ecclesiastic and secular, relate to the same individual things, for the powers, denominated ecclesiastic, are totally different from those denominated secular. Indeed, the reader's perfect knowledge of the difference may prevent his attending to this ambiguity, or rather impropriety of speech. This mode of expression ought to be avoided. "Both the ecclesiastical powers and the secular concurred in those measures," is a preferable mode of expression. "The Lords

spiritual and temporal in parliament assembled'' is ungrammatical, but use has established it as correct.

The *squinting construction* is, when a clause is so situated in a sentence that we are at a loss to ascertain whether it be connected with the words which precede or follow it. Thus, "As it is necessary to have the head clear as well as the complexion, to be perfect in this part of learning, I rarely mingle with the men, but frequent the tea-tables of the ladies." Whether "to be perfect in this part of learning it is necessary to have the head clear as well as the complexion"; or, "to be perfect in this part of learning, does he rarely mingle with the men, but frequent the tea-tables of the ladies?" Whichever of these be the sense, the words ought to have been otherwise ranged.

### THE UNINTELLIGIBLE

I come now to make some remarks on the third and last offense, mentioned in the enumeration formerly given. It was observed that a speaker may not only express himself obscurely, and so convey his meaning imperfectly to the mind of the hearer, that he may not only express himself ambiguously, and so along with his own, convey a meaning entirely different; but even express himself unintelligibly, and so convey no meaning at all. One would, indeed, think it hardly possible that a man of sense, who perfectly understands the



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language which he uses, should ever speak or write in such a manner as to be altogether unintelligible. Yet this is what frequently happens. The cause of this fault in any writer I take to be always one or other of the three following: First, great confusion of thought, which is commonly accompanied with intricacy of expression; secondly, affectation of excellence in the diction; thirdly, a total want of meaning. I do not mention as one of the causes of this imputation a penury of language, tho this, doubtless, may contribute to produce it. In fact, I never found one who had a justness of apprehension, and was free from affectation, at a loss to make himself understood in his native tongue, even tho he had little command of language and made but a bad choice of words.

### Unintelligible from Confusion of Thought

This arises from half-formed thoughts, from the writer's confused perception of the sentiments he would communicate. In all this wide field of obscure and indistinct composition we have to divine what the author would say, rather than to understand what he does say. If a discovery of the sense be made, that it is made ought rather to be ascribed to the sagacity of the reader than to the clearness of the writer. This species of the unintelligible (which, by the way, differs not in kind, but in degree, from the obscurity already considered, being no other than that bad quality in



the extreme) I shall exemplify first in simple, and afterward in complex sentences.

First, in a simple sentence: "I have observed," says Sir Richard Steele, who, tho a man of sense and genius, was a great master in this style, "that the superiority among these,"—he is speaking of some coffee-house politicians—"proceeds from an opinion of gallantry and fashion." This sentence, considered in itself, evidently conveys no meaning. First, it is not said whose opinion, their own, or that of others; secondly, it is not said what opinion, or of what sort, favorable or unfavorable, true or false, but in general an opinion of gallantry and fashion, which contains no definite expression of any meaning. With the joint assistance of the context, reflection, and conjecture, we shall perhaps conclude that the author intended to say, "that the rank among these politicians was determined by the opinion generally entertained of the rank in point of gallantry and fashion that each of them had attained."

Example of a complex sentence from the same hand "I must confess we live in an age wherein a few empty blusterers carry away the praise of speaking, while a crowd of fellows, overstocked with knowledge, are run down by them. I say overstocked, because they certainly are so, as to their service of mankind, if from their very store they raise to themselves ideas of respect and greatness of

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the occasion, and I know not what, to disable themselves from explaining their thoughts.”

### From Affectation of Excellence

In this there is always something figurative; but the figures are remote, and things heterogeneous are combined. I shall exemplify this sort also, first, in a few more simple sentences, and then in such as are more complex. Of the former, take the following instances: “This temper of soul,” says the Guardian, speaking of meekness and humility, “keeps our understanding tight about us.” Whether the author had any meaning in this expression, or what it was, I shall not take upon me to determine; but hardly could anything more incongruous in the way of metaphor have been imagined. The understanding is made a girdle to our other mental faculties, for the fastening of which girdle, meekness and humility serve for a buckle. “A man is not qualified for a butt, who has not a good deal of wit and vivacity, *even in the ridiculous side of his character.*” It is only the additional clause in the end that is here exceptionable. What a strange jumble! A man’s wit and vivacity placed in the side of his character. Sometimes in a sentence sufficiently perspicuous we shall find an unintelligible clause inserted, as, “I seldom see a noble building, or any great piece of magnificence and pomp, but I think, how little is all this to

satisfy the ambition or *to fill the idea* of an immortal soul." *To fill the idea* has no meaning. In the sake of vanity take a poetical example from Dryden, who thus sings of the Deluge:

"Yet when that flood in its own depths was  
drown'd,  
It left behind it false and slippery ground."

The first line is nonsense, the second bombast. A flood drown itself! Examples in sentences more complicated form the characteristics: "If the savor of things lies cross to honesty, if the fancy be florid, and the appetite high toward the subaltern beauties and lower order of worldly symmetries and proportions, the conduct will infallibly turn this latter way." This is that figure of speech which the French critics call *galimatias*, and the English comprehend under the general name *bombast*, and which may not improperly be defined *the sublime of nonsense*. You have lofty images and high-sounding words, but are always at a loss to find the sense. The meaning, where there is a meaning, can not be said to be communicated and adorned by the words, but is rather buried under them.

#### The Unintelligible from Want of Meaning

Instances of this kind are plentiful in the best authors. The unintelligible we last considered was accompanied with intricacy of

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expression. The reader is bewildered, and construes the sentence to ascertain the author's signification. In this, which proceeds from a vacuity of thought, the sentence is simple in its structure and the construction easy. We only detect the want of meaning by a second reading when we find the author uses identical propositions which convey no knowledge, or a proposition of that kind, of which one can not so much as affirm that it is either true or false. And this is justly allowed to be the best criterion of nonsense. It is, indeed, more difficult to distinguish sentences of this kind from those of the second class of the unintelligible already discust, in which the darkness is chiefly imputable to an affectation of excellence. But in these matters it is not of importance to fix the boundaries with precision. Sometimes pompous metaphors and sonorous phrases are injudiciously employed to add a dignity to the most trivial conceptions; sometimes they are made to serve as a vehicle for nonsense. And whether some of the above citations fall under the one denomination or the other would scarcely be worth while to inquire. It has been observed that in madmen there is as great a variety of character as in those who enjoy the use of their reason. In like manner, it may be said of nonsense, that in writing it there is as great scope for variety of style as there is in writing sense. Specimens of this kind are innumer-

able. Some of the principal are, the *Puerile*, the *Learned*, the *Profound*, and the *Marvelous*.

1. *The Puerile* is always produced when an author runs on in a specious verbosity, amusing his reader with synonymous terms and identical propositions, well turned periods and high-sounding words, to which we may affix any meaning we please; but which, in fact, are without meaning. In writings of this sort we must accept sound for sense, as:

From harmony, from heavenly harmony  
This universal frame began;  
From harmony to harmony  
Thro' all the compass of the notes it ran,  
The diapason closing full in man.

wherein nothing offends the ear or informs the judgment.

2. *The Learned* is found chiefly in scholastic theology, where the declaimer talks plausibly amid the incomprehensibility of his subject. This pulpit jargon perplexes the hearers, confounds their understanding, and creates doubt and skepticism. Of the same kind of school-metaphysics are these lines of Cowley:

Nothing is there to *come*, and nothing *past* ..  
But an eternal *now* does always last.

What an insatiable appetite has this bastard philosophy for absurdity and contradic-

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tion! A *now* that lasts—that is, an instant which continues during successive instants; an eternal now, an instant that is no instant, and an eternity that is no eternity.

But tho the scholastic theology be the principal, it is not the only subject of learned nonsense. In other branches of pneumatology we often meet with rhapsodies of the same kind.

3. *The Profound* is most commonly to be met with in political writings, nowhere else do we find the meanest things set off with an air of solemnity as the result of very deep thought and sage reflection. The only specimen we offer shall be taken from a justly celebrated tract, of a justly celebrated pen: “ ’Tis agreed,” says Swift, “that in all governments there is an absolute and unlimited power, which naturally and originally seems to be placed in the whole body, wherever the executive part of it lies. This holds in the body natural, for wherever we place the beginning of motion, whether from the head, or the heart, or the animal spirits in general, the body moves and acts by a consent of all its parts.” The first sentence of this passage contains one of the most hacknied maxims of the writers on politics—a maxim, however, of which it will be more difficult than is commonly imagined, to discover, I say, not the justness, but the sense. The illustration from the natural body, contained in the second sen-



tence, is indeed more glaringly nonsensical. What it is that constitutes this consent of all the parts of the body which must be obtained previously to every motion is, I will take upon me to affirm, utterly inconceivable. Yet the whole of the paragraph from which this quotation is taken has such a speciousness in it that it is a hundred to one even a judicious reader will not, on the first perusal, be sensible of the defect.

4. *The Marvelous* astonishes and even confounds by the boldness of its affirmations, which always appear flatly to contradict the plainest dictates of common sense, and thus to involve a manifest absurdity. It may be doubted whether in prose or verse this kind of composition most abounds. Witness the famous protestation of an heroic lover in one of Dryden's plays :

My wound is great, because it is so small.

The nonsense of which was properly exposed by an extemporary verse of the Duke of Buckingham, who, on hearing this line, exclaimed, in the house :

It would be greater, were it none at all.

Hyperbole, carried to extravagance, is much of a piece, and never fails to excite disgust, if not laughter, instead of admiration. Of this the famous laureate just quoted, tho indeed a very considerable genius, affords,



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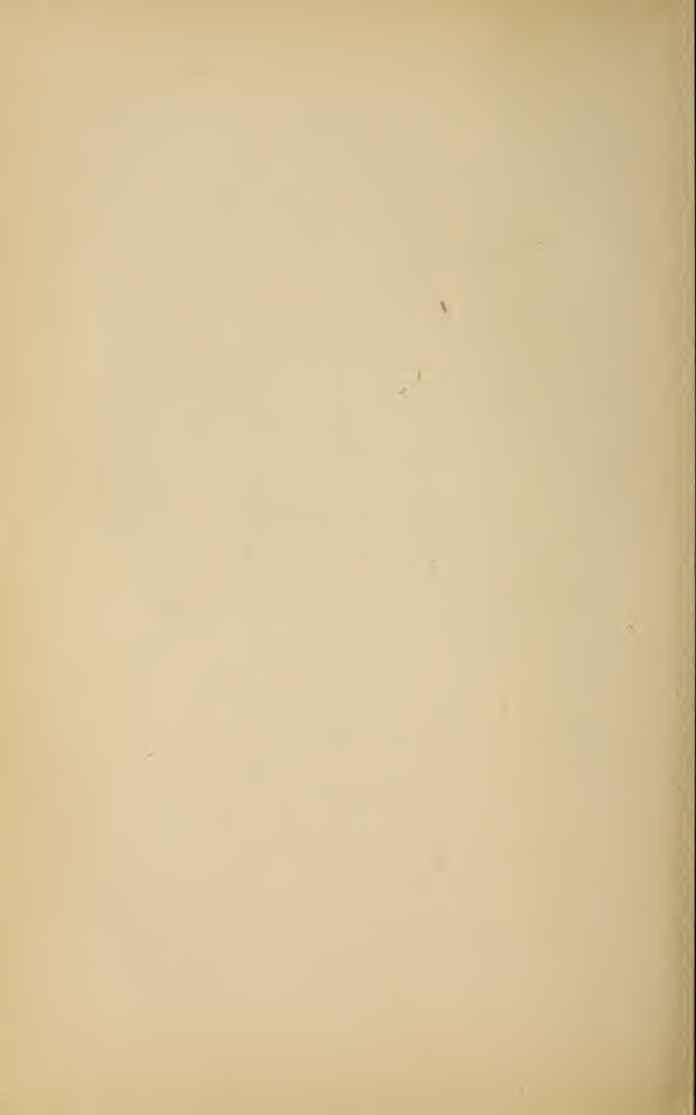
among many other striking instances, that which follows:

That star, that at your birth shone out so bright;  
It stain'd the duller sun's meridian light.

Such vile fustian ought to be carefully avoided by every writer.

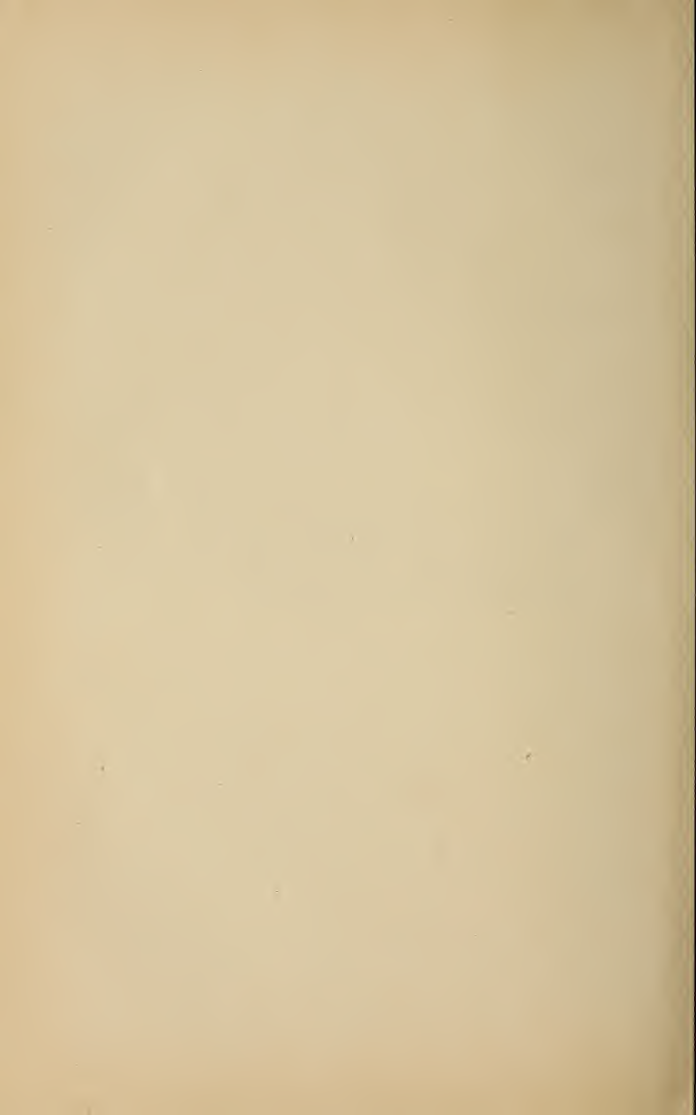
Thus I have illustrated, as far as example can illustrate, some of the principal varieties to be remarked in unmeaning sentences or nonsense—the puerile, the learned, the profound, and the marvelous; together with those other classes of the unintelligible, arising either from confusion of thought, accompanied with intricacy of expression, or from an excessive aim at excellence in the style and manner.

So much for the explication of the first rhetorical quality of style, perspicuity, with the three ways of expressing one's self by which it may be injured; the obscure, the double meaning, and the unintelligible.



CHAPTER VI

WHY IS IT THAT NONSENSE SO  
OFTEN ESCAPES BEING DE-  
TECTED, BOTH BY THE WRITER  
AND BY THE READER?



## CHAPTER VI

### WHY IS IT THAT NONSENSE SO OFTEN ESCAPES BEING DE- TECTED, BOTH BY THE WRITER AND BY THE READER?

#### THE NATURE AND POWER OF SIGNS, BOTH IN SPEAKING AND IN THINKING

**B**EFORE quitting the subject of perspicuity it will not be amiss to inquire into the cause of this strange phenomenon—that even a man of discernment should write without meaning, and not be sensible that he has no meaning; and that judicious people should read what has been written in this way and not discover the defect. Both are surprising, but the first much more than the last. A certain remissness will at times seize the most attentive reader; whereas an author of discernment is supposed to have carefully digested all that he writes. It is reported of Lopez de Vega, a famous Spanish poet, that the Bishop of Beller, being in Spain, asked him to explain one of his sonnets, which, he said, he had often read but never understood. Lopez took up the sonnet, and after reading it several times, frankly acknowledged that he did not understand it himself, a discovery which the poet probably never made before.

If we could understand nothing that is said, but by actually comparing in our minds all the ideas signified, it would be impossible that nonsense should ever escape undiscovered—at least, that we should so far impose upon ourselves as to think we understand what in reality is not to be understood. We should in that case find ourselves in the same situation, when an unmeaning sentence is introduced into a discourse, wherein we find ourselves when a sentence is quoted in a language of which we are entirely ignorant: we are never in the smallest danger of imagining that we apprehend the meaning of the quotation.

But tho a very curious fact has been taken notice of by those expert metaphysicians, and such a fact as will perhaps account for the deception we are now considering; yet the fact itself, in my apprehension, has not been sufficiently accounted for. That mere sounds, which are used only as signs, and have no natural connection with the things whereof they are signs, should convey knowledge to the mind, even when they excite no idea of the things signified, must appear at first extremely mysterious. In order, therefore, to consider the matter more closely, it will be proper to show the three following connections: First, that which subsists among things; secondly, that which subsists between words and things; thirdly, that which subsists among words, or the different terms used in the same language.

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The first of these connections is original and natural, as resemblance, equality, contrariety, cause and effect, concomitancy, vicinity in time and place, which are severally connected with other relations, by association and abstraction.

As to the second connection between words and things, it is artificial and arbitrary, having its foundation in the conventions of man. Hence certain sounds, and the ideas of things not naturally related to them, come to be as strongly linked in our conceptions as the ideas of things naturally related to one another.

By the third connection, or that which subsists among words, I mean solely that connection of relation which come gradually to subsist among the different words of a language in the minds of those who speak it, and which is merely consequent on this, that those words are employed as signs of connected or related things. It is an axiom in geometry, that things equal to the same thing are equal to one another. In like manner, ideas associated by the same idea will associate with one another. There will likewise be an association between the ideas of the signs, as each idea is associated by its own proper sign. Hence the sounds considered as signs will be conceived to have a connection analogous to that which subsists among the things signified; for this way of considering them constantly attends us in speaking, writing, hearing, and reading.



Now this conception, habit, or tendency of the mind, call it which you please, is considerably strengthened both by the frequent use of language, and by the structure of it. It is strengthened by the frequent use of language. Language is the sole channel through which we communicate our knowledge and discoveries to others, and through which the knowledge and discoveries of others are communicated to us. By reiterated recourse to this medium it necessarily happens that when things are related to each other, the words signifying those things are more commonly brought together in discourse. Hence the words and names themselves, by customary vicinity, contract in the fancy a relation additional to that which they derive purely from being the symbols of related things. Further, this tendency is strengthened by the structure of language. All languages whatever, even the most barbarous, as far as has yet appeared, are of a regular and analogical make. The consequence is, that similar relations in things will be expressed similarly—that is, by similar inflections, derivations, compositions, arrangement of words, or juxtaposition of particles, according to the genius or grammatical form of the particular tongue. Now, as by the habitual use of a language (even tho it were quite irregular) the signs would insensibly become connected in the imagination wherever the things signified are

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connected in nature; so, by the regular structure of a language, this connection among the signs is conceived as analogous to that which subsisted among their archetypes. From these principles we may be enabled both to understand the meaning and to perceive the justness of what is affirmed in the end of the preceding quotation: "The custom which we have acquired of attributing certain relations to ideas, still follows the words, and makes us *immediately* perceive the absurdity of that proposition." *Immediately*, that is, even before we have leisure to give that attention to the signs which is necessary in order to form a just conception of the things signified. In confirmation of this doctrine it may be observed that we really think by signs as well as speak by them.

### The Application of the Preceding Principles

Let us now consider how we can account, by this doctrine, for this phenomena, that a man of sense should sometimes write nonsense and not know it, and that a man of sense should sometimes read nonsense and imagine he understands it, in matters that are perfectly familiar, and are level to an ordinary capacity, in simple narration or in moral observations on the occurrences of life; a man of common understanding may be deceived by specious falsehood, but is hardly to be gulled by downright nonsense. There are particu-

larly three sorts of writing in which we are liable to be imposed on by words without meaning.

First, where there is an exuberance of metaphor. This trope, when temperately and appropriately used, adds light to the expression and energy to the sentiment. When vaguely and intemperately used it clouds the sense, where there is sense, and by consequence to conceal the defect, where there is no sense to show. Most readers will account it much to bestow a transient glance on the literal sense, which lies nearest; but will never think of that meaning more remote, which the figures themselves are intended to signify. It is no wonder, then, that this sense, for the discovery of which it is necessary to see through a double veil, should, where it is, more readily escape our observation, and that where it is wanting we should not so quickly miss it.

There is, in respect of the two meanings, considerable variety to be found in the tropical style. In just allegory and similitude there is always a propriety, or, if you choose to call it, congruity in the literal sense, as well as a distinct meaning or sentiment suggested, which is called the figurative sense. Examples of this are unnecessary. Again, where the figurative sense is unexceptionable, there is sometimes an incongruity in the expression of the literal sense. This is always the case in mixed metaphor, a thing not unfrequent

even in good writers. Thus, when Addison remarks that "There is not a single view of human nature which is not sufficient to *extinguish* the *seeds* of pride," he expresses a true sentiment somewhat incongruously; for the terms *extinguish* and *seeds* here metaphorically used do not suit each other. In like manner, there is something incongruous in the mixture of tropes employed in the following passage from Lord Bolingbroke: "Nothing less than the *hearts* of his people will content a patriot prince, nor will he think his *throne* established till it is established *there*." Yet the thought is excellent. But in neither of these examples does the incongruity of the expression hurt the perspicuity of the sentence. Sometimes, indeed, the literal meaning involves a direct absurdity. *Absurdity* and *falsehood* thus differ: An absurdity is a proposition either intuitively or demonstratively false, as "that three and two make seven." "All the angles of a triangle are greater than two right angles." That the former is false we know by intuition; that the latter is so, we are able to demonstrate. Again, if a person should say, "At the vernal equinox the sun rises in the north and sets in the south," we should not hesitate to say that he advances an absurdity; but still what he affirms has a meaning, insomuch that on hearing the sentence we pronounce its falsity. Now *nonsense* is that whereof we can not say,

either that it is true or that it is false. Thus, when the Teutonic theosopher announces that "all the voices of the celestial joyfulness qualify, commix and harmonize in the fire which was from eternity in the good quality," I should think it equally impertinent to aver the falsity as the truth of this enunciation. For, tho the words grammatically form a sentence, they exhibit to the understanding no judgment, and consequently admit neither assent nor dissent. In the former instances I say the meaning, or what they affirm, is absurd; in the last instance, I say there is no meaning, and therefore properly nothing is affirmed. In popular language, I own, the terms absurdity and nonsense are not so accurately distinguished. Absurd positions are sometimes called nonsensical. It is not common, on the other hand, to say of downright nonsense that it comprizes an absurdity.

The second species of writing in which we are liable to be imposed on by words without meaning is that wherein the terms most frequently occurring denote things which are of a complicated nature, and to which the mind is not sufficiently familiarized.

The third and last, and I may add the principal species of composition, wherein we are exposed to this illusion by the abuse of words, is that in which the terms employed are very abstract, and consequently of very extensive signification. It is an observation that plainly

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ariseth from the nature and structure of language, and may be deduced as a corollary from what has been said of the use of artificial signs, that the more general any name is, as it comprehends the more individuals under it, and consequently requires the more extensive knowledge in the mind that would rightly apprehend it, the more it must have of indistinctness and obscurity. Thus, the word *lion* is more distinctly apprehended by the mind than the word *beast*, *beast* than *animal*, *animal* than *being*. But there is, in what are called abstract subjects, a still greater fund of obscurity than that arising from the frequent mention of the most general terms. Names must be assigned to those qualities as considered abstractly which never subsist independently, or by themselves, but which constitute the generic characters and the specific differences of things. And this leads to a manner which is in many instances remote from the common use of speech, and therefore must be of more difficult conception. The qualities thus considered as in a state of separation from the subjects to which they belong, have been not unfitly compared by a famous wit of the last century to disembodied spirits:

He could reduce all things to acts,  
And knew their natures and abstracts;  
Where entity and quiddity  
The ghost of defunct bodies fly.



As the names of the departed heroes which Æneas saw in the infernal regions were so constituted as effectually to elude the embrace of every living wight; in like manner the abstract qualities are so subtile as often to elude the apprehension of the most attentive mind. They have, I may say, too much volatility to be arrested, were it but for a moment.

The fitting shadow *slips* away,  
Like winds or empty dreams that fly the day.

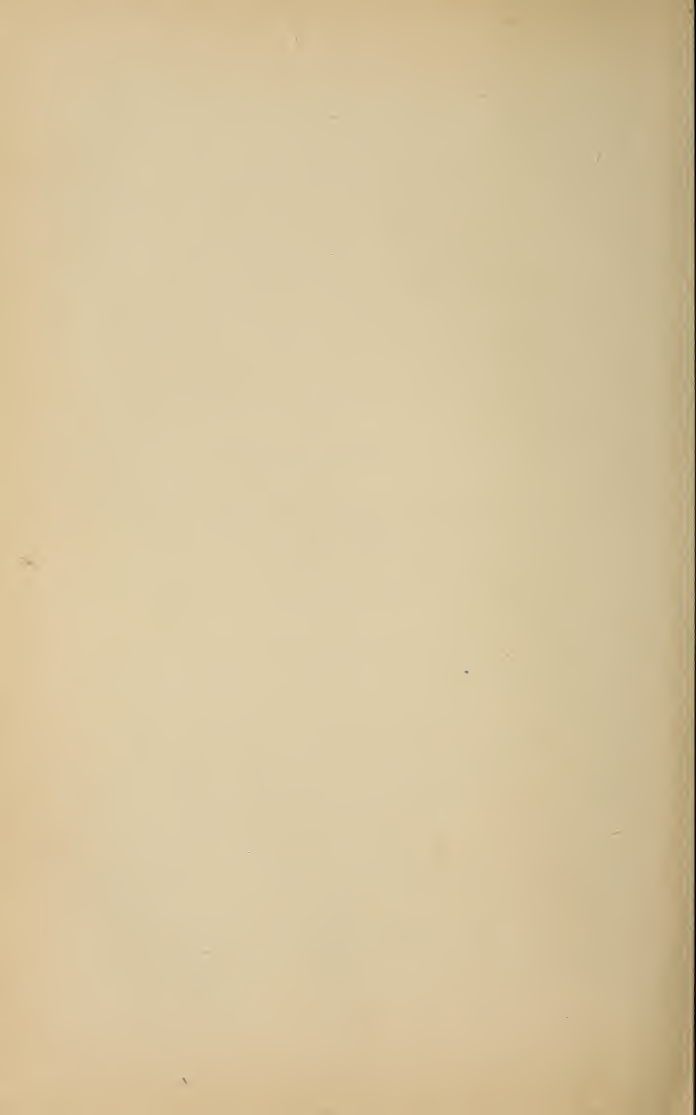
—DRYDEN.

It is no wonder, then, that a misapplication of such words escapes notice. The more general any word is in its signification, the more liable it is to be abused by an improper or unmeaning application. A foreigner will escape discovery in a crowd, who would instantly be distinguished in a select company. A very general term is applicable alike to a multitude of different individuals; a particular term is applicable but to a few. Thus, the latitude of a word, tho different from its ambiguity, has often a similar effect. And hence it is, when we are accustomed to particular terms, we fancy we understand them whether they have meaning or not.

So much for the third and last cause of illusion that was taken notice of, arising from the abuse of very general and abstract terms, which is the principal source of all the nonsense that has been vented by metaphysicians, mystagogs, and theologians.



CHAPTER VII  
THE EXTENSIVE USE OF PER-  
SPICUITY



## CHAPTER VII

### THE EXTENSIVE USE OF PERSPICUITY

WHEN IS PERSPICUITY APPOSITE, IF  
EVER IT BE APPOSITE, AND  
WHAT KIND?

HAVING considered fully the nature of perspicuity, and the various ways in which its laws may be transgressed, I shall now inquire whether to be able to transgress with dexterity in any of those ways by speaking obscurely, ambiguously, or unintelligibly, be not as essential to the perfection of eloquence as to be able to speak perspicuously.

Eloquence is the art whereby discourse is adapted to produce the effect which the speaker intends it should produce in the hearer. May not then obscurity on some occasions be as conducive to the effect intended as perspicuity is on the other occasions? If perspicuity be necessary to inform, obscurity may be necessary to deceive and persuade us to do wrong. But this way of arguing is more plausible than just; and the obscurity may on some occasions contribute to the design

of the orator, it is never essential to eloquence. As well might the speaker talk in an unknown tongue.

The natural place for sophistry is, when a speaker finds himself obliged to attempt the refutation of arguments that are both clear and convincing. For an answer to overlook such arguments altogether might be dangerous, and to treat them in such a manner as to elude their force requires the most exquisite address. A little sophistry here will, no doubt, be thought necessary by one with whom victory has more charms than truth; and sophistry always implies obscurity; for that a sophism should be mistaken for an argument can be imputed only to this, that it is not rightly understood.

Mystical theology may be benefited by nonsense, as its supposed sublimity serves with its votaries to apologize for its darkness, but this case is particular. But the sophistical and unmeaning are never capable of rivalling conclusive arguments perspicuously exprest.

The effect of the former is at most only to confound the judgment, and by the confusion it produceth to silence contradiction; the effect of the latter is fully to convince the understanding. The impression made by the first can no more be compared in distinctness and vivacity to that effected by the second than the dreams of a person asleep to his perceptions when awake. Hence we may perceive

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an eminent disadvantage which the advocate for error, when compelled to recur to words without meaning, must labor under. The weapons he is obliged to use are of such a nature that there is much greater difficulty in managing them than in managing those that must be employed in the cause of truth, and when managed ever so dexterously they can not do equal execution. A still greater disadvantage the patron of the cause of injustice or of vice must grapple with. For tho he may find real motives to urge in defense of his plea, as wealth, perhaps, or ease, or pleasure, he has to encounter or elude the moral sentiments which, of all motives whatever, take the strongest hold of the heart. And if he find himself under a necessity of attempting to prove that virtue and right are on his side, he hath his way to grope through a labyrinth of sophistry and nonsense.

So much for the legitimate use of the unintelligible in oratory.

### OBJECTIONS ANSWERED

Are there not some kinds of composition which, from their very nature, may demand a dash of obscurity? Do not decency and delicacy often require this? Is it not essential to allegorical and enigmatical styles?

Delicacy may require that sentiments be insinuated rather than exprest, and on this account they may be said to be obscurely

express. But it is the thought and not the expression in the case of which I am treating that veils the sentiment suggested. This obscurity is totally distinct from obscurity of language.

No subject requires to be treated more delicately than praise, especially when it is given to a person present. Flattery is so nauseous to a liberal spirit that, even when praise is merited, it is disagreeable at least to unconcerned hearers, if it appear in a garb which adulation commonly assumes. For this reason an encomium or compliment never succeeds so well as when it is indirect. It then appears to escape the speaker unawares, at the same time seems to have no intention to commend.

Praise is sometimes conveyed under an appearance of chagrin, or an air of reproach, or by seeming to invert the course of the obligation, and to represent the person obliging as the person obliged.

It may be observed that delicacy requires indirectness of manner no less in censure than in praise. If the one, when open and direct, is liable to be branded with the name of *flattery*, the other is no less exposed to the opprobrious appellation of *abuse*, both alike, tho in different ways, offensive to persons of taste and breeding.

In allegories, apologs, parables and enigmas there are two senses plainly intended—the lit-

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eral and the figurative: the language is solely the sign of the literal sense, and the literal sense is the sign of the figurative. Perspicuity in the style, which exhibits only the literal sense, is so far from being to be dispensed with here that it is even more requisite in this kind of composition than in any other. Accordingly, you will perhaps nowhere find more perfect models both of simplicity and of perspicuity of style than in the parables of the Gospel. Indeed, in every sort of composition of a figurative character more attention is always and justly considered as due to this circumstance than in any other sort of writing. Æsop's fables are a noted example of this remark. In further confirmation of it, we may observe that no pieces are commonly translated with greater ease and exactness than the allegorical, and that even by those who apprehend nothing of the mystical sense. This surely could never be the case if the obscurity were chargeable on the language.

Dramatic composition may sometimes be benefited by a little obscurity. Incoherent hints, precipitate sallies, vehement exclamations—in short, everything imperfect, abrupt and desultory are the natural expressions of this species of moral painting, in which the mind is confused amid the feeble checks of religion and philosophy. But even here it may be said with truth, that to one skilled in reading Nature there will arise a light out of



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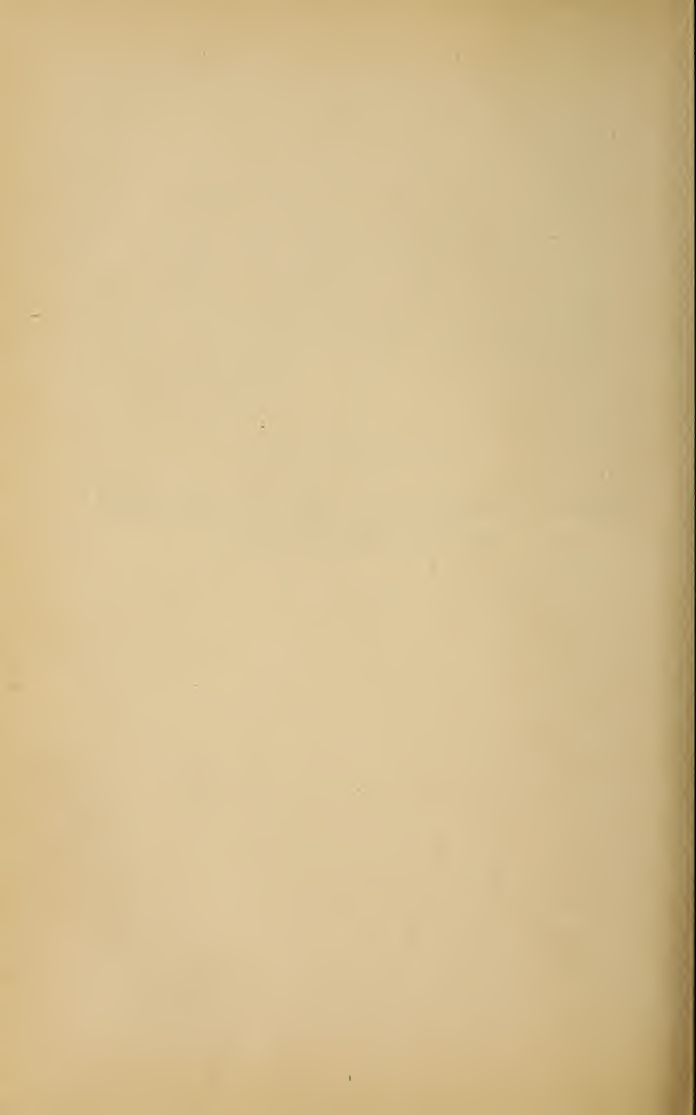
## PRACTICAL ENGLISH SERIES

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the darkness which will enable him to penetrate farther into the spirit than he could have done by the help of the most just, most perspicuous, and most elaborate description. This might be illustrated, were it necessary; but a case so singular is hardly called an exception. The dramatist, then, can but rarely claim to be indulged in obscurity of language; the fabulist never.

CHAPTER VIII

MAY THERE NOT BE AN EXCESS  
OF PERSPICUITY?



## CHAPTER VIII

### MAY THERE NOT BE AN EXCESS OF PERSPICUITY?

I SHALL conclude this subject with inquiring whether it be possible that perspicuity should be carried to excess? Too much of it has a tendency to cloy the reader, and, as it gives no play to the rational and active powers of the mind, will therefore soon grow irksome through excess of facility. In this manner some able critics have expressed themselves on this point who will be found not to differ in sentiment, but only in expression, from the principles above laid down.

The objection arises manifestly from the confounding of two objects, the common and the clear, and thence very naturally their contraries, the new and the dark, are widely different.

If you entertain your reader solely or chiefly with thoughts that are either trite or obvious, you can not fail soon to tire him. All trifling minuteness in narration, description, or instruction, which an ordinary apprehension would render superfluous, is apt to disgust us, because many things are said which ought not to be said. It is therefore futility in the thought and not perspicuity in the lan-

guage which is the fault of such performances. There is as little hazard that a piece shall be faulty in this respect as that a mirror shall be too faithful in reflecting the images of objects, or that the glasses of a telescope shall be too transparent.

At the same time, it is not to be dissembled that with inattentive readers, a pretty numerous class, darkness frequently passes for depth. To be perspicuous, on the contrary, and to be superficial are regarded by them as synonymous. But it is not surely to their absurd notions that our language ought to be adapted.

It is proper, however, before I dismiss this subject to observe that every kind of style doth not admit an equal degree of perspicuity. In the ode, for instance, it is difficult, sometimes perhaps impossible, to reconcile the utmost perspicuity with that force and vivacity which the species of composition requires. But even in this case, tho we may justly say that the genius of the performance renders obscurity to a certain degree excusable, nothing can ever constitute it an excellence. Nay, it may still be affirmed with truth that the more a writer can reconcile this quality of perspicuity with that which is the distinguishing excellence of the species of composition, his success will be the greater.

CHAPTER IX  
OF VIVACITY AS DEPENDING ON  
THE CHOICE OF WORDS





## CHAPTER IX

### OF VIVACITY AS DEPENDING ON THE CHOICE OF WORDS

**W**E NOW come to the qualities of style by which it is adapted to please the imagination, and consequently to awaken and fix the attention. The merit of any address to the fancy rests upon vivacity and elegance. By vivacity of expression resemblance is attained, as far as language can contribute to the attainment; dignity of manner, by elegance.

I begin with vivacity, whose nature (tho perhaps the word is rarely used in a signification so extensive) will be best understood by considering the several principles from which it arises. There are three things in style on which its vivacity depends, the choice of words, their number, and their arrangement.

The first thing, then, that comes to be examined is the words chosen. Words are either proper terms or rhetorical tropes; and whether the one or the other, they may be regarded not only as signs, but as sounds, and consequently as capable, in certain cases, of bearing in some degree a natural resemblance or affinity to the things signified. These three articles, therefore, proper terms, rhetorical tropes, and

the relation which the sound may be made to bear to the sense, I shall consider severally, as far as concerns the subject of vivacity, beginning with the first topic, the choice of words.

### PROPER TERMS

I begin with proper terms, and observe that the quality of chief importance in these for producing the end proposed is their *specialty*. Nothing can contribute more to enliven the expression than that all the words employed be as particular and determinate in their signification as will suit with the nature and the scope of the discourse. The more special the terms are the brighter is the picture. Thus, "they *sank* as *lead* in the mighty waters" is more emphatic than, "they *fell* as *metal*." To *sink* is peculiar to a liquid element. "Consider the lilies how they grow," is brief, sprightly and elegant; the words of the modern paraphrast tasteless, spiritless, and inelegant. "Consider the flowers, how they gradually increase in their size." The most rigid philosopher, if he choose that his disquisitions be not only understood but relished (and without being relished they are understood to little purpose), will not disdain sometimes to apply to the imagination of his disciples, mixing the pleasant with the useful. This is one way of sacrificing to the Graces.

But I proceed to give examples in such of

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the different parts of speech as are most susceptible of this beauty. The first shall be in the verbs :

It seem'd as there the British Neptune stood,  
With all his hosts of waters at command,  
Beneath them to *submit* th' officious flood;  
And with his trident *shov'd* them off the sand.

The words *submit* and *shov'd* are particularly expressive of the action here ascribed to Neptune; indeed, the verb *raised* would not be equivalent to *shov'd*, for it would alter the meaning.

Examples in adjectives and particles :

The kiss *snatch'd* hasty from the *sideling* maid,  
On purpose guardless.

The words *sideling* and *snatched* are significant, sprightly and elegant—for this species of energy takes place principally in those parts of speech which regard life and action. Say *ta'en* and *skance* for *snatch'd* and *sideling* and you render the expression dull, flat and graceless.

Examples in nouns from Milton :

Thence up he flew, and on the tree of life,  
Sat like a *cormorant*.

If for *cormorant* he had said *bird of prey*, which would have equally suited both the meaning and the measure, the image would still have been good, but weaker than it is by this specification.

In adjectives the same author has given an excellent example in describing the attitude in which Satan was discovered by Ithuriel and his company, when that malign spirit was employed in infusing pernicious thoughts into the mind of our first mother,

Him there they found  
*Squat* like a toad, close at the ear of Eve.

No word in the language could have so happily expressed the posture as that which the poet has chosen.

It will be easy from the same principles to illustrate a remark of the Stagyrite, on the epithet *rosy-finger'd*, which Homer has given to the morning. This, says the critic, is better than if he had said *purple-finger'd*, and far better than if he had said *red-finger'd*. Aristotle has observed the effect solely in respect of *beauty*, but the remark holds equally true of those epithets in respect of *vivacity*.

Examples of the adverb:

Some say, he bid his angels turn *askance*,  
The pole of earth twice ten degrees and more,  
From the sun's axle.

Here *askance* is more energetic than *aside*. This adverb (*aside*) is of two general significations, and might have been used with equal propriety if the plane of the ecliptic had been made perpendicular to that of the equator; whereas the word *askance*, in that case, could not have been employed in denoting just such

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an obliquity in the inclination of these two planes as actually obtains. We have an example of the same kind in the description which Thomson gives us of the sun newly risen :

Lo! now apparent all,  
*Aslant* the dewbright earth, and color'd air,  
He looks in boundless majesty abroad.

Further, it will sometimes have a considerable effect in enlivening the imagery, not only to particularize, but even to individuate the object presented to the mind. This conduct Doctor Blair in his very ingenious dissertation on the poems of Ossian, observes to have been generally followed by his favorite bard. His similitudes bring to our view *the mist on the hill of Cromla, the storm on the sea of Malmor, and the reeds of the lake of Lego*. The same vivacious manner is often to be found to be in Holy Writ, *swift as a roe or as a fawn upon Mount Bether, white as the snow in Salmon, fragrant as the smell of Lebanon*.

The notions we form of *individuals* in distinction to a species or a genus, tends greatly to add to our sympathy and vivid perceptions of the thing spoken of. Even in fiction the feigned names of persons are more spirited than would be the initials of anonymous individuals. We fancy ourselves in company with the actors, and enter with more spirit into the detail of their adventures than it will be possible for us to do if you always

speak of them in the indefinite, the general, and therefore the unassuming style of *the gentleman* and *the lady*, or *he* and *she*. This manner, besides, has an air of concealment, and is ever reminding us that they are people we know nothing about.

It arises from the same principle that whatever tends to subject the thing spoken of to the notice of our senses, especially of our eyes, greatly enlivens the expression. In this way the demonstrative pronouns are often of considerable use. "I have coveted," says Paul to the elders of Ephesus, "no man's silver, or gold, or apparel; yea, ye yourselves know that *these* hands have ministered to my necessities, and to them that were with me." Had he said "*my* hands," the sentence would have lost nothing either in meaning or in perspicuity, but very much in vivacity.

### THE DIFFERENT SORTS OF TROPES CONDUCTIVE TO VIVACITY

There are various ways in which rhetorical tropes may be rendered subservient to vivacity.

#### The Less for the More General

The first way I shall mention is, when, by means of the trope, a species is aptly represented by an individual, or a genus by a species. I begin with this, because it comes nearest that specialty in the use of proper terms,



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from which, as was evinced already, their vivacity chiefly results. Of the individual for the species I shall give an example from our celebrated satirist, Mr. Pope :

May some choice patron bless each gray goose-quill!  
May every Bavius have his Bufo still!

Here, by a beautiful antonomasia, Bavius, a proper name, is made to represent one whole class of men; Bufo, also a proper name (it matters not whether real or fictitious), is made to represent another class. By the former is meant every bad poet; by the latter every rich fool who gives his patronage to such. As what precedes in the Essay secures the perspicuity (and in introducing tropes of this kind, especially new ones, it is necessary that the perspicuity be thus secured), it was impossible in any other manner to express the sentiment with equal vivacity.

This is also a sort of antonomasia to which use has long ago given her sanction, and which therefore need not be introduced with much precaution, as a *Solomon* for a wise man, a *Cræsus* for a rich man, a *Judas* for a traitor, a *Homer* for a poet.

In our language we use sparingly that kind of synecdoche by which the species is put for the genus, as when an assassin is termed a *cut-throat*, or a fiction a *lie*; slaughter by the poets *murder*, and legal prosecution by the defendants *persecution*.



The Most Interesting Circumstances  
Distinguished

The second way I shall take notice of, where-  
in the use of tropes may conduce to vivacity,  
is when the trope tends to fix the attention on  
that particular of the subject which is most  
interesting, or on which the action related, or  
fact referred to, immediately depends. This  
bears a resemblance to the former method, for  
by that an individual serves to exhibit a spe-  
cies, and a species a genus; by this a part is  
made to represent the whole; the abstract, as  
logicians term it, to suggest the concrete, the  
passion its object, the operation its subject,  
the instrument the agent, and the gift the  
giver. Synecdoche and metonymy are the  
tropes which contribute in this way to invigo-  
rate the expression, as *hands* for persons:

All *hands* employed, the royal work grows warm.

Or a *sail* for a ship; tho it would be nonsense  
to say "our sails plowed the main" for our  
*ships* plowed the main, because *plowing the  
main* is the immediate action of the keel, a  
very different part of the vessel. To produce  
but one other instance, the word *roof* is em-  
phatically put for house in the following quo-  
tation:

Return to her? and fifty men dismiss?  
No; rather I abjure all *roofs* and choose  
To be a comrade with the wolf and owl,  
To wage against the enmity o' th' air,  
Necessity's sharp pinch. . . .

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The notion of a house as a shelter from the inclemencies of the sky, alluded to in these lines, directly leads the imagination to form a more vivid idea of that part of the building which is over our heads.

Metonymy contributes in this way to vivacity by substituting the instrument for the agent, by employing the abstract to represent the concrete, or by naming a passion for its object, the gift for the giver, the operation for the subject.

Of the first sort is *pen* for a literary person; *pencil* for painter.

The second species of metonymy mentioned, the abstract for concrete, seldom occurs, but has also in the same way a very good effect. Isaac Bickerstaff, in his lucubrations, acquaints us with a visit which an eminent rake and his companions made to a Protestant nunnery erected in England by some ladies of rank. "When he entered," says the author, "upon seeing a servant coming toward him, with a design to tell him this was no place for him, up goes my grave *Impudence* to the maid." Everybody must perceive that the expression would have been incomparably fainter, if he had said, "Up goes my grave *impudent fellow* to the maid." The reason is obvious: an *impudent fellow* means one who among other qualities, has that of impudence; whereas, by personifying the abstract, you leave no room for thinking of any other

quality; the attention is entirely fixt on that which the action related is imputable, and thus the natural tendency of the fancy is humored by the expression.

### Things Sensible for Things Intelligible

A third way wherein tropes may be rendered subservient to vivacity is when things intelligible are represented by things sensible. There is no truth more evident than that the imagination is more strongly affected by what is perceived by the senses than by what is conceived by the understanding. If, therefore, my subject be of things only conceivable, it will conduce to enliven the style that the tropes which I employ, when I find it convenient to employ tropes, exhibit to the fancy things perceivable.

I shall illustrate this doctrine first in metaphors. A metaphor, if apposite, has always some degree of vivacity, from the bare exhibition of likeness, even tho the literal and the figurative senses of the word belong to the same class of objects: I mean only in this respect the same, that they be both sensible or both intelligible. Thus a *blunder* in the administration of public affairs has been termed a *solecism* in politics, both things intelligible. The word *sails* for the wings of a fowl, and *wings* for the sails of a ship are metaphors that have much vivacity by reason

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of the striking resemblance both in the appearance of the things signified and in their use. The words of which I am speaking I call metaphors in their origin; notwithstanding which they may be at present, agreeably to what was formerly observed, proper terms. When speaking of tropes in general, it was remarked that many words which to a grammatical eye appear metaphors, are in the rhetorician's estimate no metaphors at all. The ground of this difference is, that the grammarian and the rhetorician try the words by very different tests. The touchstone of the former is etymology, that of the latter is present use. The former peruses a page, and perhaps finds not in the whole ten words that are not metaphorical; the latter examines the same page, and does not discover in it a single metaphor. What critic, for example, would ever think of applying this appellation to terms such as these: *Spirit, evidence, understanding, reflection?* Or what etymologist would not acknowledge that to this trope solely these terms had owed their birth?

But I proceed to give examples of vivacity by true rhetorical metaphors, wherein things sensible are brought to signify things intelligible. Of this the following in one from Pope:

At length Erasmus, that great injur'd name,  
(The glory of the priesthood, and the shame!)  
Stemm'd the wild torrent of a barbarous age,  
And drove those holy vandals off the stage.

Here the almost irresistible influence of general manners, which is an object purely of the understanding, is very appositely and vivaciously represented by a *torrent*, an object both of the sight and of the feeling. By the same vivid kind of metaphor, *light* is used for knowledge, *bridle* for restraint; we speak of *burning* with zeal, *inflamed* with anger, and having a *rooted* prejudice.

Metonymy, as well as metaphor, frequently confers vivacity, as when a badge is put for an office; thus, the *crown* for royalty, the *miter* for the priesthood, the *sword* for the army, the *gown* for lawyers. Or when the effect is put for the causes, and a sensible object in place of an intelligible one presented to the mind, as,

'Tis all thy business, business how to shun,  
To bask thy naked body in the *sun*.

Tho the rime had permitted the change, the word *sunshine* instead of *sun* would have rendered the expression weaker. The luminary itself is not only a nobler and distincter, but a more immediate, object to the imagination than its effulgence, which tho in some respect sensible as well as the other, is in some respect merely intelligible, it not being perceived directly any more than the air, but discovered by reflection from the things which it enlightens. Accordingly we ascribe to it nei-

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ther magnitude nor figure,, and scarcely with propriety even color. As an exemplification of the latter, the effect or something consequential for the cause, or at least the implement for the motive of using it, these words of Scripture will serve, "The *sword* without, and terror within," where the term sword, which presents a particular and perceivable image to the fancy, must be more picturesque than the word *war*, which conveys an idea that is vague and only conceivable, not being otherwise sensible but by its consequences.

### Things Animate for Things Lifeless

A fourth way in which tropes may promise vivacity is when things sensitive are presented to the fancy instead of things lifeless, or things sentient to things inanimate. The imagination is more strongly affected by things sensible than by things intelligible; and things animate awaken greater attention than things senseless. Hence, the quality I am treating has been called vivacity or liveliness of style.

Thus, the metaphor, "*offspring* of the brain" for literary production, and "empire in its childhood" for government in its first stage.

In the following instances sense, feeling and affection are ascribed metaphorically to inanimate matter. Thus, Thomson describes the



influence of the sunbeams upon the snow of the valley:

. . . . Perhaps the vale,  
*Relents* awhile to the reflected ray.

“Every hedge,” says the “Tatler,” “was *conscious* of more than what the representations of enamored swains admit of.” Who sees not how much of their energy these quotations owe to the two words *relents* and *conscious*? I shall only add that it is the same kind of metaphor which has brought into use such expressions as the following: A *happy* period, a *learned* age, the *thirsty* ground, a *melancholy* disaster.

There are several sorts of metonymy which answer the same purpose. The first I shall mention is that wherein the inventor is made to denote the invention: *Ceres*, for instance, to denote bread; *Bacchus*, wine; Mars, war; or any of the pagan deities to denote that in which he is specially interested; as, *Neptune*, the sea; *Pluto*, hell; *Pallas*, wisdom; and *Venus*, the amorous affection. It must be owned that as this kind seems even by the ancients to have been confined to the discoveries, attributes, or dominions ascribed in their mythology to the gods, it is of little or no use to us moderns.

Another tribe of metonymies which exhibits things living for things lifeless is when the possessor is substituted for his possessions.



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Of this we have an example in the Gospel: "Wo unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for ye devour the *families* of widows." Here the word *families* is used for their means of subsistence. Like to this is an expression in Balaam's prophecy concerning Israel: "He shall eat up the *nations* his enemies."

A third tribe of metonymies which often presents us with animate instead of inanimate objects, is when the concrete is made to signify the abstract: as *the fool*, used for folly; *the knave*, for knavery; *the philosopher*, for philosophy. I shall illustrate this by some examples. Dryden has given us one of this kind that is truly excellent.

The slaving cudden propt upon his staff,  
Stood ready gaping with a grinning laugh,  
To welcome her awake, nor durst begin  
To speak, but wisely kept *the fool* within.

The whole picture is striking; the words are all finely graphical, and the metonymy in the conclusion remarkably vivid. Again, "Craterus loves the *king*, but Hephestion loves Alexander," is a fine example of metonymy. The metonymy lies in *king* being put for *royalty*. Dryden and Grotius have copied the same mode of expression, the latter in a remark which he has made, perhaps with more ingenuity than truth, on the two apostles, Peter and John. The attachment of John, he observes, was to *Jesus*, of Peter to *the Messiah*. Accordingly, their master gave the latter the

charge of His church, the former that of His family, recommending to him in particular the care of Mary, His mother. Dryden copies it thus:

Who follow next a double danger bring  
Not only hating David but the *King*.

The sense is, they have not only a hatred of David, the man who was king, but of the kingly office they entertained a rooted detestation. The following sentiment of Swift is somewhat similar:

I do the most that friendship can;  
I hate *the viceroy*, love the man.

*The viceroy* for the viceroyalty. I shall only add two examples more in this way: the first is from Addison, who speaking of Tallard when taken prisoner by the allies, says:

An English muse is touch'd with generous wo,  
And in th' unhappy man forgets *the foe*.

*The foe*, that is, his state of hostility with regard to us at the time. For the second I shall again recur to Dryden:

A tyrant's power in rigor is exprest,  
*The father* yearns in the true prince's breast.

*The father*, to denote fatherly affection, or the disposition of a father. In fine, it may justly be affirmed of this whole class of tropes, that as metaphor in general has been termed an allegory in epitome, such metaphors and metonymies as present us with things animate in

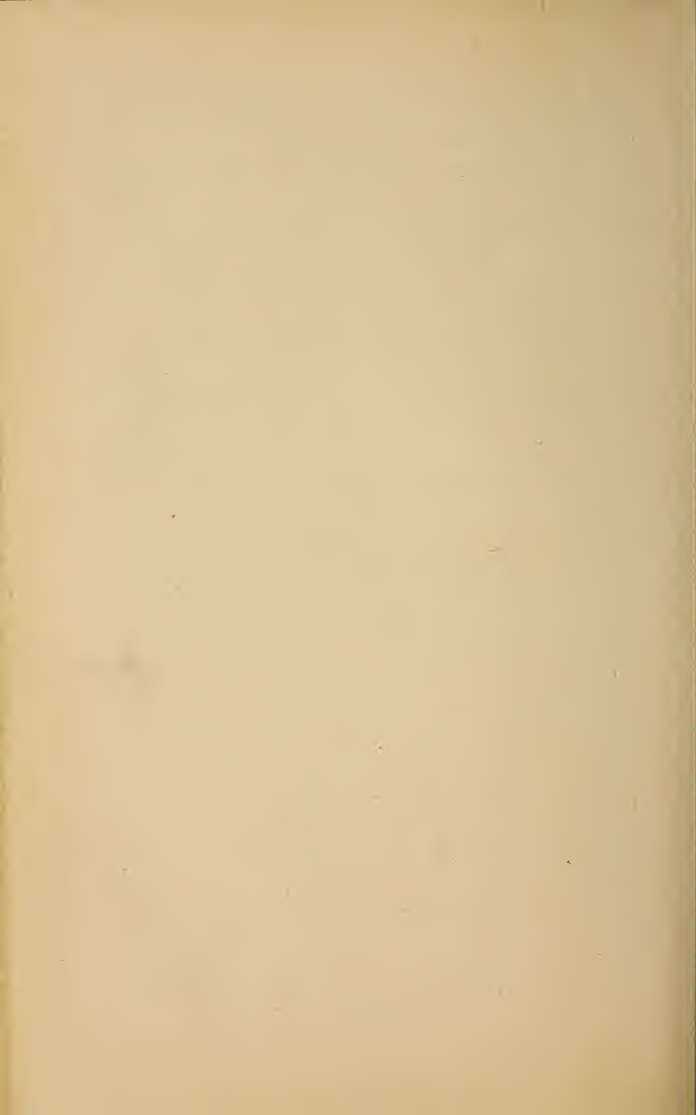
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the room of things lifeless are prosopopeias in miniature.

I have here examined the tropes so far only as they are subservient to vivacity, by presenting to the mind some image which, from the original principles of our nature, more strongly attaches the fancy than could have been done by the proper terms whose place they occupy. And on this examination I have found that they produce this effect in these four cases: First, when they can aptly represent a species by an individual, or a genus by a species; secondly, when they serve to fix the attention on the most interesting particular, or that with which the subject is most intimately connected; thirdly, when they exhibit things intelligible by things sensible; and fourthly, when they suggest things lifeless by things animate. How conducive the tropes are in like manner both to elegance and to animation will be examined afterward. They even sometimes conduce to vivacity, not from anything preferable in the ideas conveyed by them, but in a way that can not properly come under consideration till we inquire how far this quality depends on the number of words and on their arrangement.



CHAPTER X

OF VIVACITY, AS DEPENDING ON  
THE NUMBER OF THE WORDS



## CHAPTER X

### OF VIVACITY, AS DEPENDING ON THE NUMBER OF THE WORDS

**O**N THIS subject it may be established as a maxim that admits no exception, and it is the only maxim which this article admits, that the fewer the words are, provided neither propriety nor perspicuity be violated, the more vivid always is the expression. "Brevity," says Shakespeare, "is the soul of wit." This much is certain, that of whatever kind the sentiment be, witty, humorous, grave, animated, or sublime, the more briefly it is exprest, the greater is the energy or the more enlivened is the sentiment, and the more displayed the particular quality for which it is eminent.

Among the ancients the Lacedemonians were the most remarkable for conciseness. To use few words, to speak energetically, and to be laconic were almost synonymous. As when the rays of the sun are collected into the focus of a burning-glass, the smaller the spot is which receives them, compared with the surface of the glass, the greater is the splendor; or, as in distillation, the less the quantity of spirit is, that is extracted by the still, compared with the quantity of liquor from which the extrac-



tion is made, the greater is the strength; so, in exhibiting our sentiments by speech, the narrower the compass of words is, wherein the thought is comprized, the more energetic is the expression.

### THE PRINCIPAL OFFENSES AGAINST BREVITY CONSIDERED

Tho this energetic brevity is not adapted alike to every subject, we ought, on every subject, to avoid its contrary, a languid redundancy of words. It is sometimes proper to be copious, but never to be verbose. The faults we are to consider are these:

#### Tautology

Tautology is either a repetition of the same sense in different words, or a representation of anything as the cause, condition, or consequence of itself. Of the first, which is also the least, take an example from Addison:

The dawn is overcast;—the morning lours;  
And—heavily in clouds brings on the day—

Here the same thought is repeated thrice in different words. Of the last kind I shall produce a specimen from Swift: "I look upon it as *my duty*, so far as God has enabled me, and as long as I keep within the bounds of truth, of *duty*, and of decency." It would be strange, indeed, that any man should think it his duty to transgress the bounds of duty.

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Another example from the same hand you have in the words which follow: "So it is, that I must be *forced* to get home, partly by stealth and partly by *force*." "How many are there," says Bolingbroke, "by whom these *tidings* of good *news* were never heard?" These are *tidings* of *tidings*, or *news* of *news*. "Never did Atticus succeed better in gaining the *universal* love and esteem of *all* men." Either of the two words in italics might have been used, but not both.

It is also considered as of the nature of tautology to lengthen a sentence by coupling words altogether which are nearly synonymous, whether they be substantives or adjectives, verbs or adverbs. This fault is very common, and to be found even in our best writers. All words that add nothing to the sense or clearness diminish the force of the expression. The endless and needless synonyms used by some writers are as repugnant to vivacity as to dignity of style. There are two occasions on which synonymous words may be used; one is when an obscurer term which we can not avoid precedes or follows, and needs explanation by one that is clearer. The other is, when the language of the passions is exhibited. Passion naturally dwells on its objects; the impassioned speaker always attempts to rise in expression; but when that is impracticable, he recurs to repetition and synonymy, and thereby in some measure produces the same

effect. The hearer, perceiving him, as it were, overpowered by his subject, and at a loss to find words adequate to the strength of his feelings, is by sympathy carried along with him, and enters into all his sentiments. There is in this case an expression in the very effort shown by recurring to synonyms, which supplies the deficiency in the words themselves. Bolingbroke exclaims, in an invective against the times, "But all is little, and low, and mean among us." It must be owned that there is here a kind of amplification, or, at least, a stronger expression of indignation than any one of these three epithets could have effected alone; yet there is no climax in the sentence, and in this metaphorical use of the words no sensible difference of signification. But everybody must perceive that this manner suits only the popular and declamatory style; in compositions which admit no species of the pathetic it can have no place.

An adjective and its substantive sometimes include a tautology, as when the former expresses nothing but what is implied in the signification of the latter. Thus, *umbrageous shade, verdant green, foul dirt*. Double comparatives are always tautological.

#### Pleonasm

Another trespass against this species of vivacity is *pleonasm*, which implies barely superfluity, or more than enough. Here, the

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the words do not, as in tautology, add to the sense, they add nothing to it. In the instance, "They returned *back again* to the *same* city from whence they came *forth*," instead of "They returned to the city whence they came." The five words, *back*, *again*, *same*, *from*, and *forth*, are mere expletives. They serve neither for ornament nor for use, and are therefore to be regarded as incumbrances. "I went home," says the Guardian, "full of a *great many* serious reflections"; much better, "full of serious reflections." "If he happens," says the "Spectator," "to have any leisure *upon his hands*." To what purpose "*upon his hands*?" "The everlasting club treats all other clubs with *an eye of* contempt," for "treats all other clubs with contempt." *To treat with the eye* is a vulgarity. "I wrote *a letter* to you yesterday," is incorrect, *a letter* being superfluous. But when an additional circumstance is added, as "I wrote you a long letter yesterday," the nicest judge will not condemn the phrase as pleonastic. It may not be improper here to remark that every word that is accounted an expletive does not always constitute a pleonasm. For example, the *do* and the *did*, as the signs of the tenses, are frequently necessary, and sometimes emphatical. The idiom of the language renders them for the most part necessary in negation and interrogation; and even in affirmation they are found in cer-

ances to give an emphasis to the  
 u. For instance, "Did I object to  
 measure formerly? I do object to it  
 ' ; or, "What I did publicly affirm then,  
 I do affirm now, and I will affirm always."  
 The contrast of the different tenses in these  
 examples is more precisely marked by such  
 monosyllables as are intended singly to point  
 out that circumstance, than they can be by  
 the bare inflections of the verb. The particle  
*there*, when it is not an adverb of place, may  
 be considered as a kind of expletive, since we  
 can not assign to it a separate sense. Never-  
 theless it is no pleonasm, for tho it is not easy  
 to define in words the import of such terms,  
 yet if the omission of them make the expres-  
 sion appear either stiff or defective, they are  
 not to be regarded as useless.

### Verbosity

The third and last fault I shall mention  
 against a vivid conciseness is *verbosity*. This,  
 it may be thought, coincides with the pleonasm  
 already discust. One difference, however, is  
 this: In the pleonasm there are words which  
 add nothing to the sense; in the verbose man-  
 ner, not only single words but whole clauses  
 may have a meaning, and yet it were better to  
 omit them, because what they mean is un-  
 important. Instead, therefore, of enlivening  
 the expression, they make it languish. Another  
 difference is, that in a proper pleonasm a com-

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plete correction is always made by  
This will not always answer in the ve.  
style; it is often necessary to alter as well as  
erase.

*Verbosity* is not the same fault as *verbiage*.  
The latter is a mere parade of fine words, with-  
out meaning; but there may be a multiplicity  
of words, where the meaning is not disguised.

One instance of a faulty exuberance of  
words is the temperate use of circumlocution;  
but this figure is sometimes allowable, some-  
times a beauty, sometimes a blemish. We in-  
dulge it for the sake of variety; we choose it  
sometimes for the sake of decency; sometimes  
propriety requires its use, as when Milton  
says of Satan, who had been thrown down  
headlong into hell:

*Nine times the space that measures day and night.  
To mortal men, he with his horrid crew  
Lay vanquish'd rolling in the fiery gulf.*

To have said *nine days and nights* would not  
have been proper when talking of a period  
before the creation of the sun, and conse-  
quently before time was portioned out to any  
being in that manner. Sometimes this figure  
serves, as it were accidentally, to introduce a  
circumstance which favors the design of the  
speaker, and which to mention of plain pur-  
pose, without apparent necessity, would ap-  
pear both impertinent and invidious. An ex-  
ample I shall give from Swift: "One of these  
authors (*the fellow that was pilloried*; I have

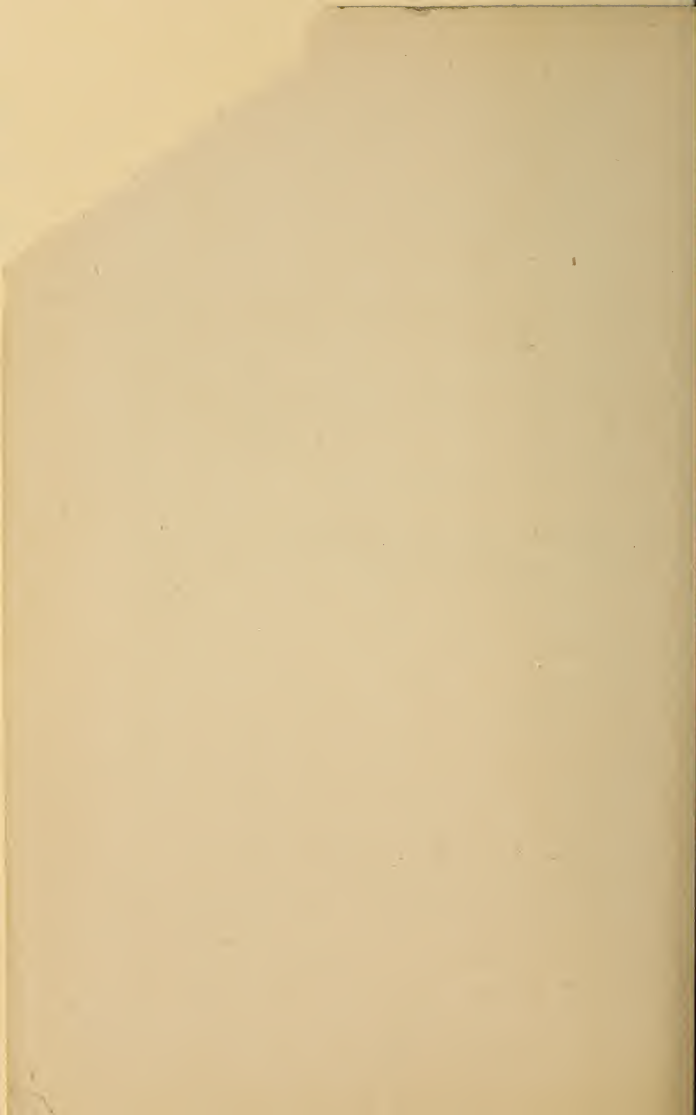


(his name) is so grave, sententious, dogmatical a rogue, that there is no enduring aim." What an exquisite antonomasia have we in this parenthesis! Yet he has rendered it apparently necessary by his saying, "I have forgot his name." Sometimes even the vivacity of the expression may be augmented by a periphrasis, as when it is made to supply the place of a separate sentence. Of this the words of Abraham afford an instance: "Shall not *the* Judge of all the earth do right?" *The judge of all the earth* is a periphrasis for God.

Another source of languor in style is when such clauses are inserted as to a superficial view appear to suggest something which heightens, but on reflection are found to presuppose something which abates the vigor of the sentiment. Of this I shall give a specimen from Swift: "Neither is any condition of life more honorable in the sight of God than another, otherwise He would be a respecter of persons, *which He assures us He is not.*" It is evident that this last clause doth not a little enervate the thought, as it implies but too plainly that without this assurance from God Himself we should naturally conclude Him to be of a character very different from that here given Him by the preacher.



CHAPTER XI  
OF VIVACITY, AS DEPENDING ON  
THE ARRANGEMENT OF WORDS



## CHAPTER XI

### OF VIVACITY, AS DEPENDING ON THE ARRANGEMENT OF WORDS

**H**AVING already shown how far vivacity depends either on the words themselves, or on their number, I come now, lastly, to consider how it is affected by their arrangement.

This, it must be owned, has a very considerable influence in all languages, and yet there is not anything which it is more difficult to regulate by general laws. The placing of the words in a sentence resembles, in some degree, the disposition of the figures in a history-piece. As the principal figure ought to have that situation in the picture which will, at the first glance, fix the eye of the spectator, so the emphatic word ought to have that place in the sentence which will give it the greatest advantage for fixing the attention of the hearer. In painting there can rarely arise a doubt concerning either the principal figure or the principal place. In many sentences it may be a question both what is the word on which the emphasis ought to rest and what is the situation which will give it the highest relief. Our language allows us as much liberty as will, if

we know how to use it. But when neither the imagination nor the passions of the hearer are addrest, it is hazardous in the speaker to depart from the practise which generally obtains in the arrangement of the words; and that even tho the sense should not be in the least affected by the transposition. The temperament of our language is phlegmatic, like that of our climate. When, therefore, neither the liveliness of representation nor the warmth of passion serve, as it were, to cover the trespass, it is not safe to leave the beaten track. Whatever is supposed to be written or spoken in a cool and temperate mood must rigidly adhere to the established order, which, with us, as I observed, allows but little freedom. What is said will otherwise inevitably be exposed to the reproach of quaintness and affectation, than which, perhaps, no censure can do greater prejudice to an orator. But as it is indubitable that in many cases both composition and arrangement may, without incurring this reproach, be rendered greatly subservient to vivacity, I shall make a few observations on these, which I purpose to illustrate with proper examples.

Composition and arrangement in sentences, tho nearly connected, and, therefore, properly in this place considered together, are not entirely the same. Composition includes arrangement and something more. When two sentences differ only in arrangement, the

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sense, the words, and the construction are the same; when they differ also in other articles of composition there must be some difference in the words themselves, or in the manner of construing them. Sentences are either simple or complex. Simple sentences consist of one member, as, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." Complex sentences consist of two members, as, "Doubtless, thou art our father, tho Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not." In the former we consider merely the distribution of the words; in the latter regard must be had to the arrangement. The members, too, are sometimes complex, and admit of a subdivision into clauses, as, "The ox knoweth its owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider." Here the two members are subdivided into two clauses each, each having a verb. Of such a sentence as this, "I have called, but ye refused," we should say indifferently that it consists of two members or of two clauses. The members or the clauses are not always perfectly separate, the one succeeding the other. One of them is sometimes very aptly enclosed by the other, as in the subsequent instance: "When Christ (who is our life) shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory." This sentence consists of two members, the former of which is divided into two clauses; one of these clauses,

“who is our life,” being, as it were, embosomed in the other, “when Christ shall appear.”

So much for the primary distinction of sentences into simple and complex.

### SIMPLE SENTENCES

With regard to simple sentences, it ought to be observed first, that there are degrees in simplicity. “God made man,” is a very simple sentence. “On the sixth day God made man of the dust of the earth after His own image,” is still a simple sentence in the sense of rhetoricians and critics, as it has but one verb, but less simple than the former on account of the circumstances specified. The simpler the sentence the less scope there is for variety of arrangement, yet even in the simplest, whatever strongly impresses the fancy is sufficient to authorize the violation of the rule.

In English the nominative has the first place, the verb the second, and the accusative the third, if the verb be active; if it be the substantive verb, the participle, adjective, or predicate occupies the third place. This order is sometimes inverted, as “Great is Diana of the Ephesians.” Alter the arrangement, restore the grammatic order, and say, “Diana of the Ephesians is great,” and you destroy at once the signature of impetuosity and ardor

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resulting, if you please to call it so, from the disarrangement of the words.

We are apt to consider the customary arrangement as the most consonant to nature, in consequence of which notion we brand every departure from it as a transgression of the natural order. This way of thinking ariseth from some very specious causes, but is far from being just. "Custom," it has been said, "becomes a second nature." Nay, we often find it strong enough to suppress the first. Accordingly, what is in this respect accounted natural in one language is unnatural in another. In Latin, for example, the negative particle is commonly put before the verb; in English it is put after it; in French one negative is put before and another after. If in any of these languages you follow the practise of any other, the order of the words will appear unnatural. We, in Britain, think it more suitable to nature to place the adjective before the substantive; the French and most other Europeans think the contrary. We range the oblique cases of the personal pronouns, as we do the nouns whose place they occupy, after the verb; they range them invariably before, by *custom*, which is thus different in different nations.

The next example I shall produce is very similar to the former, as in it the substantive verb is preceded by the participle passive, and followed by the nominative. In the acclama-



tions of the people on our Savior's public entry into Jerusalem, the historian informs us that they cried out, "Blest is He that cometh in the name of the Lord." Instead of this, say, "He that cometh in the name of the Lord is blest," and by this alteration in the order of the words, apparently trifling, you convert a fervid exclamation into a cold aphorism.

The third example shall be of an active verb, preceded by the accusative, and followed by the nominative, as "Silver and gold have I none." The beggar looked for money, it is first mentioned, and his attention is then directed to the apostle's mission, "But that which I have, give I thee; in the name of Jesus Christ arise and walk."

My fourth example should be one wherein the verb occupies the first place in the sentence, which often happens in the ancient languages with great advantage in point of vivacity. But this can not frequently obtain in English without occasioning an ambiguity. The first place, when given to a verb, being, by the rules of our syntax, appropriated to distinguish these three things, a command, as "*Stay* not here"; a question, as "*Were* they present?" and a supposition, as "*Had* I known"; from an assertion, as "*Ye stay* not here," "*They were* present," and "*I had* known." A few trifling phrases, as *said he*, *replied they*, are the sole exceptions in the simple tenses, at least in prose. In some in-

stances, however, in the compound tenses, the verb may precede without giving rise to any double meaning. In such cases it is not the auxiliary or the substantive verb that begins the sentence, as in supposition and interrogation, but the infinitive of the principal verb in the active voice, and the participle in the passive, as in expressions like these, “*Go* I must, whatever may ensue.” “*Avoid* it he could not by any means.” An instance in the passive voice has been given in the second example.

Often a particle, such as an adverb or preposition belonging to a compound verb (for it matters not in which way you consider it), emphatically begins the sentence, as in that formerly quoted for another purpose: “*Up* goes my grave Impudence to the maid.” In the particle *up* that circumstance is denoted which particularly marks the importance of the action.

Of all the other parts of speech the conjunctions are the most unfriendly to vivacity; and next to them the relative pronouns, as partaking of the nature of conjunctions. These particles are of use chiefly to knit together complex sentences, and their frequent recurrence can not fail to prove tiresome and unenlivening. Nowhere has simplicity in the expression a better effect in invigorating the sentiments than in poetical description on interesting subjects. Consider the song composed by

Moses, on occasion of the passage of the Israelites through the Red Sea, and you will find that part of the effect produced by that noble hymn is justly imputable to the simple, the abrupt, the rapid manner adopted in the composition. I shall produce only two verses for a specimen. "The enemy said, I will pursue; I will overtake; I will divide the spoil; my revenge shall be satiated upon them: I will draw my sword; my hand shall destroy them; Thou blewest with Thy breath; the sea covered them; they sank as lead in the mighty waters." This is the figure which the Greek rhetoricians call *asyndeton*, and to which they ascribe a wonderful efficacy. Here conjunctions and relatives are superseded by the natural connection, which is both close and manifest. The converse of this figure is the *polysyndeton*, to which the rhetoricians ascribe energy, celerity of operation, and fervor in narration, which are best expressed by the first; a deliberate attention to every circumstance as being of importance, and to this in particular, the multiplicity of the circumstances is best awakened by the second. The conjunctions and relatives excluded by the *asyndeton* are such as connect clauses and members; those repeated by the *polysyndeton* are such as connect single words only. All connectives are alike set aside by the former; the latter is confined to copulatives and disjunctives. These two examples will illustrate

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the difference: "While the earth remaineth, seed time, and harvest, and cold, and heat, and summer, and winter, and day and night shall not cease." Everything to which a permanency of so great importance is secured requires the most deliberate attention, and in the following declaration of the apostle much additional weight and distinctness are given to each particular by the repetition of the conjunction: "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God."

### COMPLEX SENTENCES

I come now to the consideration of complex sentences. These are of two kinds. They are either periods or sentences of a looser composition, for which the language does not furnish us with a particular name. A period is a complex sentence, wherein the meaning remains suspended till the whole is finished. The connection consequently is so close between the beginning and the end as to give rise to the name *period*, which signifies circuit. The following is such a sentence: "Corruption could not spread with so much success, tho reduced into system, and tho some ministers, with equal impudence and folly, avowed

it by themselves and their advocates to be the principal expedient by which they governed; if a long and almost unobserved progression of causes and effects did not prepare the conjuncture." The criterion of a period is this: If you stop anywhere before the end, the preceding words will not form a sentence, and therefore can not convey any determined sense. This is plainly the case with the above example. The first verb being *could* and not *can*, the potential and not the indicative mood, shows that the sentence is hypothetical, and requires to its completion some clause beginning with *if*, *unless*, or some other conditional particle. And after you are come to the conjunction, you find no part where you can stop before the end. From this account of the nature of a period we may justly infer that it was much easier in Greek and Latin to write in periods than it is in English, or perhaps in any European tongue. The construction with them depended mostly on inflection; consequently the arrangement was much in their own power; and as the sense of every sentence hangs on the verb, one ordinary way with them of keeping the sense suspended was by reserving the verb to the end. Modern language rarely permits us to imitate this. In loose sentences there will always be found one place at least before the end at which, if you make a stop, the construction of the preceding part will render it a complete sentence.

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In a period the dependence of the members is reciprocal; in a loose sentence the former members have not a necessary dependence on the latter, whereas the latter depend entirely on the former. Indeed, if both former and latter members are, in respect of construction, alike independent of each other, they do not constitute one sentence, but two or more. And here I shall remark, by the way, that it is by applying the observation just now made, and not always by the pointing, even where the laws of punctuation are most strictly observed, that we can discriminate sentences. When they are closely related in respect of sense, and when the sentences themselves are simple, they are for the most part separated only by commas or by semicolons; rarely by colons, and almost never by points.

But there is an intermediate sort of sentences which must not be altogether overlooked, tho they are neither entirely loose nor perfect periods. Of this sort is the following: "The other institution," he is speaking of the eucharist, "has been so disguised by ornament, || and so directed in your church at least, to a different purpose from commemoration, that if the disciples were to assemble at Easter in the chapel of His Holiness, Peter would know his successor as little, || as Christ would acknowledge His *vicar*; and the rest would be unable to guess || what the ceremony *represented* || or intended." There are four



members in this sentence: The first is complex, including two clauses, and ending at *commemoration*; the second is simple and ends at *Holiness*. The sentence could not terminate at either of these places or at any of the intermediate words. The third member is subdivided into two clauses, and ends at *vicar*. Had the sentence been concluded here there would be no defect in the construction. The fourth member, which concludes the sentence, is also compound, and admits a subdivision into three clauses. The sentence might have terminated at the word *represented*, which finishes the second clause. The two words which could have admitted a full stop after them are distinguished by italics.

On comparing the two kinds of complex sentences together, to wit, the period and the loose sentence, we find that each has its advantages and disadvantages. The former savors more of artifice and design; the latter seems more the result of pure Nature. The period is nevertheless more susceptible of vivacity and force; the loose sentence is apt, as it were, to languish and grow tiresome. The first is more adapted to the style of the writer; the second to that of the speaker. But as that style is best, whether written or spoken, which has a proper mixture of both, so there are some things in every species of discourse which require a looser and some which require a preciser manner. In general,



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the use of periods best suits the dignity of the historian, the political writer, and the philosopher. The other manner more befits the facility which ought to predominate in essays, dialogues, familiar letters, and moral tales. These approach nearer the style of conversation, into which periods can very rarely find admittance.

### Observations on Periods, and on the Use of Antithesis in the Composition of Sentences

tence, because the energy is diffused through the latter, but in the former collected into a single point. To avoid obscurity rhetoricians have generally prescribed that a period should consist of four members.

The only rule which will never fail is to beware both of prolixity and of intricacy, and the only competent judges in the case are good sense and a good ear.

A great deal has been said both by ancient critics and by modern on the formation and turn of periods; but their remarks are chiefly calculated with a view to harmony. In order to prevent the necessity of repeating afterward, I shall take no notice of these remarks at present, tho the rules founded on them do also, in a certain degree, contribute both to perspicuity and to strength.

That kind of period which has most vivacity is commonly that wherein you find an antithesis in the members, the several parts of one having a similarity to those of the other,

adapted to some resemblance in the sense. The effect produced by the corresponding members in such a sentence is like that produced in a picture where the figures of the group are not all on a side, with their faces turned the same way, but are made to contrast each other by their several positions. Besides, this kind of periods is generally the most perspicuous. There is in them not only that original light which results from the expression when suitable, but there is also that which is reflected reciprocally from the opposed members. The relation between these is so strongly marked that it is next to impossible to lose sight of it. The same quality makes them also easier for the memory.

I shall give an example of a period where, in one of the members, this rule is not observed. "Having already shown how the fancy is affected by the works of Nature, and afterward considered in general both the works of Nature and of Art, || how they mutually assist and complete each *other*, || in forming such scenes and prospects || as are most apt to delight the mind of the beholder; I shall in this paper throw together some reflections on that particular art, || which has a more immediate tendency than any other, || to produce those pleasures of the imagination, || which have hitherto been the subject of this discourse." This sentence is a period, agreeably to the definition formerly given. Wherever we stop,

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the sentence is imperfect till we reach the end. But the members are not all composed according to the rule laid down. It consists of three members. The first ends at *Nature*, is a single clause, and therefore not affected by the rule; the second is complex, consisting of several clauses, and ends at *beholder*; the third is also complex, and concludes the sentence. The last member can not be faulty, else the sentence would be no period. The fault must then be in the structure of the second, which is evidently loose. That member, tho not the sentence, might conclude, and a reader naturally supposes that it does conclude, first at the word *art*, afterward at the word *other*, both of which are before its real conclusion. Such a composition, therefore, even in periods, occasions, tho in a less degree, the same kind of disappointment to the reader, and consequently the same appearance of feebleness in the style, which result from long, loose and complex sentences. A very little alteration in the faulty member will unite the clauses more intimately and entirely remove the exception, as thus: "and afterward considered in general, how in forming such scenes and prospects as are most apt to delight the mind of the beholder, the works both of Nature and of Art mutually assist and complete each other."

It may be thought, and justly, too, that this care will sometimes make the expression ap-

pear elaborate. I shall only recommend it as one of the surest means of preventing this effect, to render the members as simple as possible, and particularly to avoid synonyms and redundancies, of which there are a few in the member now criticized. Such are *scenes* and *prospects*, *assist* and *complete*, *mutually*, and *each other*. With the aid of this reformation also, the whole period will appear much better compacted as follows: "Having already shown how the fancy is affected by the works of Nature; and afterward considered in general || how in forming such scenes as are most apt to delight the mind of the beholder, || the works both of Nature and Art assist each other; I shall in this paper throw together some reflections on that particular art, || which has a more immediate tendency than any other, || to produce those primary pleasures of the imagination, || which have hitherto been the subject of this discourse."

### OBSERVATIONS ON LOOSE SENTENCES

In complex sentences of looser composition there is, as was observed, a much greater risk of falling into a languid manner. This may arise from the different causes. First, even where the sentence is neither long nor complex, the members will sometimes appear disjointed. The consequence always is that a hearer will at first be in doubt whether it be one sentence

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or more. Take the following for an example: "However, many who do not read themselves, || are seduced by others that *do*, and thus become unbelievers upon trust, and at second *hand*; and this is too frequent a case." The harmony of the members taken severally contributes to the bad effect of the whole. The cadence is so perfect at the end both of the first member and of the second, that the reader is not only disappointed but surprized to find the sentence still unfinished. The additional clauses appear out of their proper place like something that had been forgotten. The excessive length of the sentence is another cause of languor here.

### REVIEW OF WHAT HAS BEEN DEDUCED ABOVE IN REGARD TO ARRANGE- MENT

I have now briefly examined how far arrangement may contribute to vivacity, both in simple sentences and in complex, and from what principles in our nature it is that the effect arises.

In this discussion I have had occasion to consider, in regard to simple sentences, the difference between what may properly be called the rhetorical and natural order and that which I have denominated the artificial and grammatical, or the customary way of combining the words in any particular lan-

guage. I have observed, as to the former, and taken some pains to illustrate the observation, that it is universal; that it results from the frame of spirit in which the sentiment, whatever it be, is spoken or written; that it is by consequence a sort of natural expression of that frame, and tends to communicate it to the hearer or the reader. I have observed also that this order, which alone deserves the name of natural, is in every language more or less cramped by the artificial or conventional laws of arrangement in the language; that, in this respect, the present languages of Europe, as they allow less latitude, are considerably inferior to Greek and Latin, but that English is not a little superior in this particular to some of the most eminent of the modern tongues. I have shown also that the artificial arrangement is different in different languages, and seems chiefly accommodated to such simple explanation, narration and deduction as scarcely admits the exertion either of fancy or of passion.

In regard to complex sentences, both compound and decompound, I have remarked the difference between the loose sentence and the period; I have observed the advantages and the disadvantages of each in point of vivacity, the occasions to which they are respectively suited, the rules to be observed in composing them, and the faults which, as tending to enervate the expression and tire the reader,

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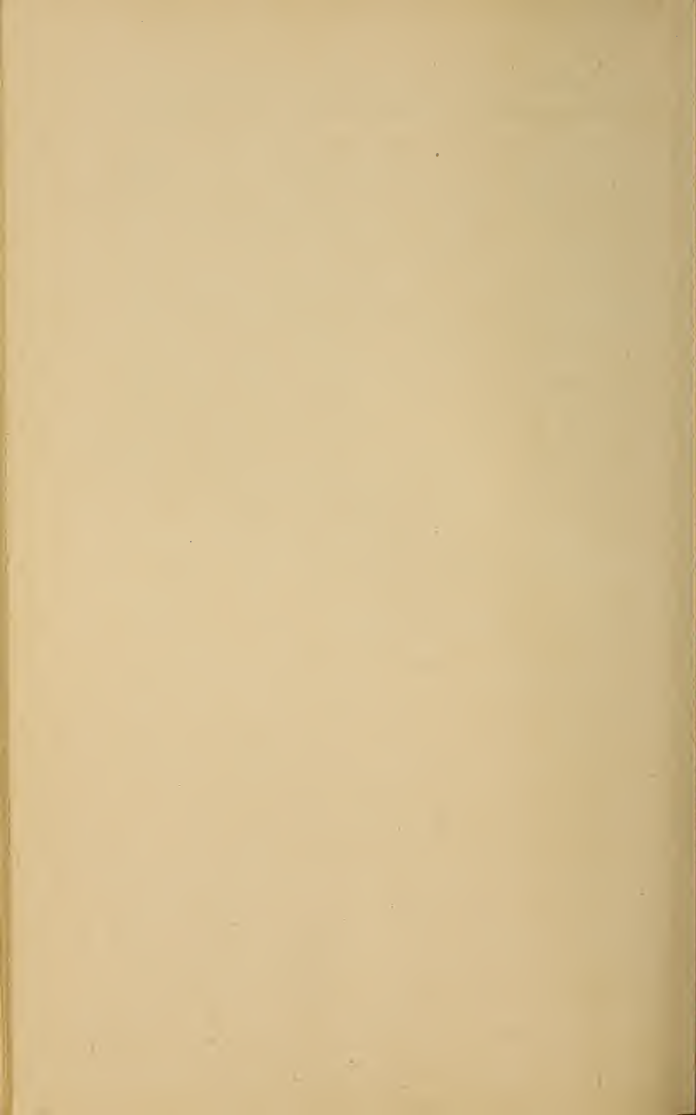
## THE PHILOSOPHY OF RHETORIC

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ought carefully to be avoided. I have also made some remarks on the different kinds of antithesis, and the uses to which they may properly be applied.

Thus much shall suffice for the general illustration of this article concerning the vivacity which results from arrangement.





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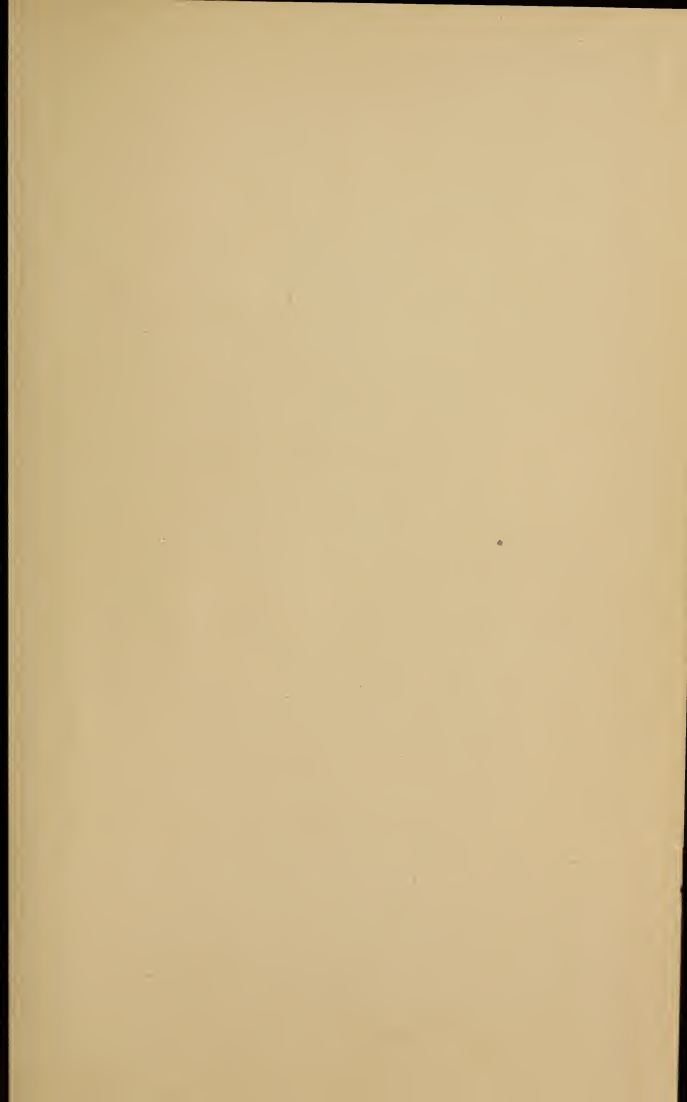
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